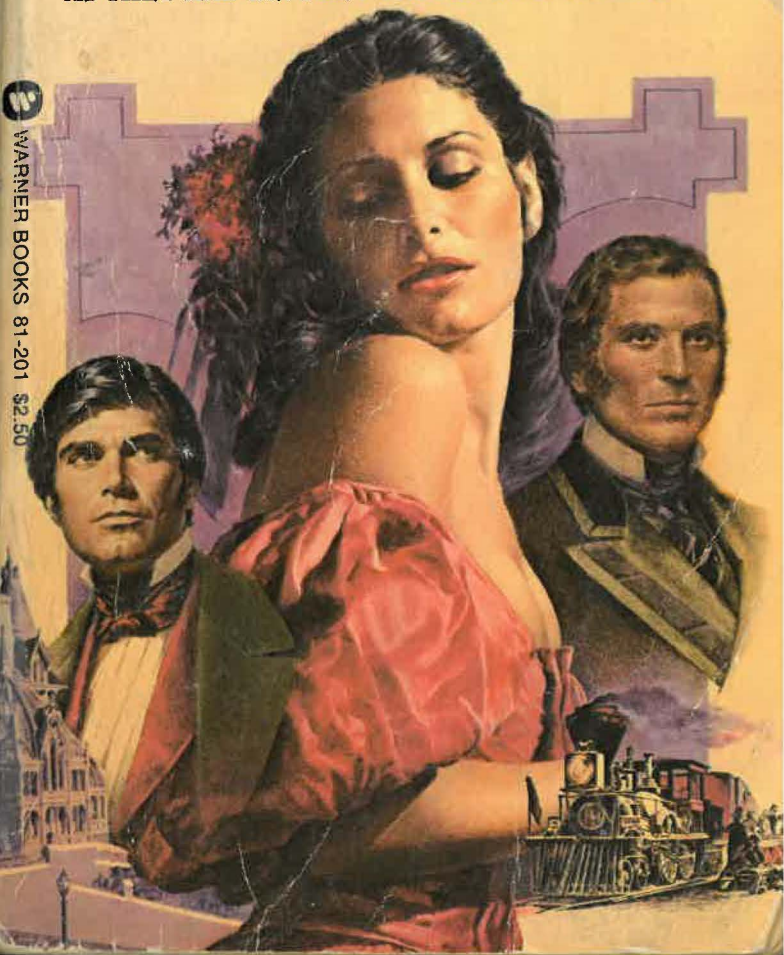


A SAGA OF 19TH-CENTURY

Frederick Nolan

Carver's Kingdom SAID.

THE STORY OF A WOMAN SO RARE
THE BUILDERS OF EMPIRES PURSUED HER—
AS THEY HAD BEFORE PURSUED ONLY WEALTH



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"I CAN'T LOVE YOU, THEO," SHE SAID.
"I AM MARRIED TO CHARLIE."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes, I do," Sarah said.

"Like this?" Theo said fiercely. He was angry and she had never seen him angry before. He rose from the chair and swept her into his arms. She might as well have tried to resist a hurricane. He held her as if he would never release her, showering her face with kisses, his broad, strong hands crushing her body against his.

"Is this how you love him?" he muttered. "Or this . . . or this?"

"Theo," she said, pushing ineffectually against his grip. "Let me go! Theo, let me go!"

"No," he growled. "Not this time."

He kissed her again and then again, and again. . . . Somewhere inside herself she knew that she must stop now and let this go no further, but she wanted to be powerless, she wanted to be swept along on the tide of her own feelings. She wanted him just as much as he wanted her. . . .

Carver's Kingdom

Frederick Nolan



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Author's Note

Many of the characters in *Carver's Kingdom* are historical figures; likewise, many of the events described actually happened. However, the Carver family—sons, parents, wives, lovers—are all fictitious, as are Charlie and Sarah, Kieron Conway and the Terrills of Virginia.

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PROLOGUE

January 24, 1848

When the clock in the Kanesville church tower struck twelve noon, Sarah sent Laurie Rodgers off to get some lunch at May's place and closed the store. She went into the little back room behind the store to make herself a snack. It wasn't worth walking all the way home through the snow, and anyway, the house was cold and empty with Charlie away on the road. She hated going home at night, lighting the fire, waiting for the house to get warm, cooking a meal for herself, sitting in the lamplight sewing or mending until it was time to go lonely and alone to her empty bed.

Charlie and his partner Jack McGowan had left nearly two weeks earlier to drum up some business for the store. They would come back with precious little profit, Sarah knew from experience. Most of it would have been spent on corn whiskey.

"Hell," Charlie would say, "a man's got to have *some* fun when he's out on the road, Sarah. It's pretty damned miserable in them one-horse towns, you know."

Not a word about how miserable it was to be left behind in one. Charlie rarely gave any thought to what he left behind, wife or business or his own past. It was as if he had used everything he had, getting together enough money for the partnership. Now he was waiting for a lucky break as if he were entitled to one. Sarah opened the account books with a sigh, staring at her own neat script with unseeing eyes. Her thoughts were far away, remembering,

remembering a young girl in a navy-blue going-away dress sitting proudly beside her new husband as they drove down the hill, away from her home, away from Fort des Moines.

"I'll make you happy, Sarah," Charlie Malone had promised her that day. "I'll give you everything a woman could want."

That had been only the first of a thousand broken promises. She had discovered very quickly that Charlie's word was not his bond, and that several roads to Hell could be paved with his good intentions. It didn't matter, any more than it mattered that he was restless and unsure of himself. That was part of a wife's role, to support her man, to help him, guide him. But when she tried, Charlie grew bitter and angry with her. He resented her questioning his judgments, even though they were unconsidered. He rejected her suggestions even though his own actions were impulsive. He made his stand in foolish pride, which reacted to wounding with scorn and disregard. The more she tried, the more strongly he rejected her. Both knew it was happening; neither of them could prevent it. She learned to weather the storms of his sudden rages, wounding criticisms, casual disinterest. There were things that had to be done that he did not care to do or would not do, and since someone had to do them, Sarah did them. She was aware that she was just existing, waiting for a change that would not happen. She did not know what else to do. Night after night she had lain staring at the ceiling, lonelier in her marriage bed than she had ever been before in her life. Charlie did not seem to want her any more. There had been a time when he could not wait to love her, but now night after night he turned his back on her, callously and deliberately. When he did not, it was not love at all: he used her, nothing more.

Mentally reprimanding herself for wool-gathering, Sarah bent again to her books. Perhaps it will be better when he comes home this time, she thought. I'll make a steak and kidney pie, he likes that. Maybe things will be different this time. She shook her head. No, they won't, the other part of her mind said. There is no fire any more: just ashes. She looked around the cluttered back room, looked

at her drab clothes, her cheerless life. I want more than this, she thought, fiercely. I want more than this!

* * *

Theodore Carver had read Francis Parkman's 'sketches' of life on the Oregon trail so many times that he could recite some of the passages by heart. From the moment he had read the first sentence: "Last Spring, 1846, was a busy season in the city of St. Louis," he had been engulfed, enthralled. It was the best book about life across the Missouri that he had ever read. It took him as if in life to Fort Leavenworth, across the Platte and the desert to Fort Laramie, to an Ogallallah Sioux village, to the fabled Black Hills of the Dacotahs. The Parkmans were prominent Boston Brahmins several cuts about the social level of the Carvers, but Theo thought he might use his Harvard connection and called at the Parkman mansion in the hope of seeing the author. He was told that Mr. Francis was indisposed and left his card. Several further calls elicited an identical response. He was never asked in, never told more. Much later he learned that Parkman had suffered a mental collapse. He never did meet him.

Even so, he was consumed by impatience and excitement and the desire to see these new lands Parkman had so vividly described. There had been talk of his going to medical school, but he wanted nothing to do with prescribing for rich Boston ladies with the vapors. That was fine for Pa, who'd done very well at it. But these days, a young fellow just knew his future lay in the west.

"There'll be all sorts of opportunities out there for a man who's prepared to work hard," he said. He knew he was a hard worker. He considered himself to be sensible, well-liked, a planner but not a plodder. It did not occur to him that he was, for such a young man, also faintly pompous.

Ranching, banking, land investment, these were just a few of the areas a fellow could get into if he went out to the new country. There'd be all sorts of chances for a man with his head screwed on properly, he said.

"But Oregon!" his younger brother Ezra whispered in

the darkness of their room. They talked endlessly of Theo's plans, long after everyone else in the house was fast asleep. "What can you do there that you can't do here?"

"A mercantile business to start," Theo said. He'd given a lot of thought to it. People in a new country needed hardware, clothes, tools, timber. Few would have money: a fellow could barter for their crops, give them scrip with their land as security. He had it all worked out. Ezra would be his factotum in the East, finding the goods for him, arranging for them to be shipped west.

"It sounds pretty dull to me, Theo," Ezra said. "I'm not much on being an errand boy."

"Just till I get started, Ez," Theo said.

"Well," Ezra hesitated. "If you think it'll work."

"It'll work."

"What makes you so sure?"

"I just know, Ez," Theo whispered. "It's a feeling I have."

"Aren't you afraid of going out there alone?"

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Theo said loftily, hoping it was true.

"Maybe I could come, too," Ezra said. He did not want to go, but he was loyal to Theo, almost protectively so. If Theo wanted him to go along, he would go.

"I don't think Mama would let you," Theo said. Pa might thunder and strike a pose, but in the end it would be Mama who had her way. Anyway, Theo thought, this is my adventure, not Ezra's. He wanted some thunder that Ezra couldn't steal the way Ezra always stole his thunder. He knew Ezra was sharper than he, faster and perhaps even ruthless. Something told him that if he stayed in Boston he would always be under his brother's shadow. He wanted to see the west: so westward he would go; and right now, unless something quite astonishing happened, Oregon was the place.

As for Ezra, he had his own opinions about the wisdom of Theo's plans. He, too, had read Parkman's sketches, and they didn't excite him at all, any more than Theo's ambition to run a store or a ranch or a bank did. Own them, yes, Ezra thought. But to spend your life selling dry goods to farmers! Ezra didn't consider it worth riding in a

wagon across the entire continent, and risking your scalp in the bargain, to do that. Let others build the new world out west. There were plenty of opportunities right here in Boston and in the burgeoning midwest. Pa's friend Asa Whitney was talking to some people he knew in the railroad business who might have a position for a bright young man. Ezra was reading everything he could find on railroad construction and financing. He was too young to do much right now except maybe help Theo. But he could wait. When he saw his chance he would grab it.

* * *

"Have another," Charlie said.

"Don't mind if I do," Jack McGowan said. He was a heavily-built man with smoldering dark eyes that always looked resentful.

"Be back home tomorrow," Charlie observed, as the bartender filled their glasses.

"Right," Jack confirmed, joylessly.

"Where you boys from?" the bartender asked.

"Kanesville," Charlie said.

"Oh, Mormons," the bartender said.

"No," McGowan growled. "We ain't."

"All right," the barman said, nervously. "No offense."

McGowan glared at him. Charlie knew he wasn't really angry. He'd never seen Jack angry. He always looked angry, but it was just those dark eyes.

"Been a good trip," Charlie said.

"Uh-huh."

"Enjoyed getting away."

"Right."

"Listen, Jack," Charlie said. "You ever think of, well, movin' on? You know. Pulling your picket pin?"

"How'd you mean?"

"Cutting loose. Headin' west, maybe. Oregon, somewhere like that."

"You crazy?" Jack said. He pulled out a plug of tobacco and bit it as if he hated it. "Mary Ann wouldn't leave Kanesville. She was borned there."

Mary Ann was Jack's wife. Sarah said she was a foul-mouthed slattern, and would have nothing to do with her.

It was just another of the many things Sarah did to make life that bit more difficult for him, Charlie thought. A man's wife ought to get along with his partners' wives, whether she liked them or not.

"I guess not," he said. The silence in the saloon was pleasant and companionable. The only other men there were a couple of oldsters playing dominoes at a table near the pot bellied stove. The bartender stood silently at the end of the bar polishing his glasses and pretending not to listen to their conversation. He had them pegged for a couple of sports and was wondering whether to mention the fact that Bella Devine was usually free this time of day and glad of the business. Bella slipped him fifty cents for every client he sent her.

Outside it was snowing steadily, heavy soft white flakes coming straight down as if they had weights in them, silently covering the street and the scattered frame shacks of Camberton with a pleasing blanket of white that gentled their harsh lines. It wasn't much of a town, Charlie thought, looking out of the window. But then, none of them were. You could starve to death in a place like Camberton while you were trying to find a man to do business with. Just the same, the heat from the stove was friendly and comforting, persuading you to stay indoors.

"Another?" McGowan said.

"Hell, yes," Charlie said, louder than he had intended. "Why not?" He gestured to the barman, whose eyes flickered over McGowan as if weighing him as he poured the drinks. He hoped they weren't going to get drunk. The small one was getting a bit louder. The big one looked like a troublemaker. He didn't want any trouble.

"You boys interested in a good time?" he said, quietly.

Jack McGowan just looked at him. He didn't say anything. The bartender held up both hands palm forward.

"Okay," he said. "Okay." He backed off to the far end of the bar. McGowan didn't look at him any more. He shook his head, the gesture of a man who doesn't know what the world is coming to.

"You serious, Charlie?" he said.

"Huh?"

"About goin' west."

"I tell you, Jack, I'm thinkin' on it."

"Goin' west," Jack said, reflectively.

"Right. Oregon, maybe. Somewhere a man can start over."

"Be kinda nice, that," McGowan said. "You'd sell out?"

"You want to buy my share in the store?"

"Don't know as I could, Charlie," Jack said. "We ain't been doin' all that good."

"I guess not," Charlie said.

"What about your wife?" Jack said. "What about Sarah?"

"She could stay on in Kanesville. Till I got something lined up. I could always send for her," Charlie said, adding defensively, "later."

"Yeah, sure," Jack said.

"Man oughtn't to take a woman out into the wilderness 'thout knowin' where he's goin' to light," Charlie said. "A woman needs a house to live in, a bed with sheets on it."

"Well, there's something to that," McGowan said, his brow clearing as he saw the logic of what Charlie was saying. "Ought to say just that to Mary Ann."

"She'd agree, I'll bet you," Charlie said.

"More'n likely."

"You'd come along?"

"Bears thinkin' about," Jack said. "Maybe Laurie'd come, too. He's got no womenfolk to worry about."

"We could put it to him," Charlie said. "Maybe Sarah could keep the store going till we got fixed up."

"You talked to her about this?"

"No," Charlie said, "not yet."

"Ah," Jack said.

"She'll do what I say," Charlie said, putting conviction into his voice. Somehow it seemed important that McGowan believed it.

"Got a mind of her own, that girl," Jack said.

She had that, Charlie thought, and a damned stubborn one to boot. By his lights a wife did what her husband said, bowed to his will or his wishes. But not Sarah. He wanted to possess her, to own her, but Sarah would not be owned. Somehow, without ever saying anything, she made it clear to him that while she was his wife, that did not

mean she belonged to him. Always off-balance, Charlie compensated by an assertiveness he did not feel, angrily definite about things of which he was really unsure. A man's better alone, he thought. Women want to sit home, to sew, to have babies, neighbors, to talk of inconsequentialities. A man doesn't want any of that. A man wants the freedom to climb a new hill, see a new horizon. Women tied you down. Something in him wanted to sever the tie that bound him to Sarah; but he could not bear the thought of any other man possessing her.

"It's been a good trip," he said again. "I enjoyed it."

He had already long forgotten that it had been Sarah who persuaded him to take it.

"Yeah," McGowan said.

"Man's entitled to kick up his heels once in a while."

"Damn right."

"Listen," Charlie said. "You want to go?"

"To Oregon? I might," Jack said.

"Let's have another," Charlie said.

* * *

Needing a sawmill to provide lumber for his many projects, Johann Augustus Sutter, owner of a large farming-ranching-mercantile establishment at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers in California, took into partnership at the beginning of 1847 an itinerant carpenter and jack of all trades named James Marshall. Sutter, an amiable and gregarious man, was a terrible businessman. He had fled his native Germany in 1834, bankrupt. His Californian enterprise, called New Helvetia to honor his Swiss origins, was almost constantly and disastrously in debt. His thirty-five year old partner was just as feckless. He had failed at every single thing he ever turned his hand to.

Marshall found a good location for the sawmill about fifty miles northeast of Sutter's fort, on the south fork of the American river. There were good stands of pine there and the water moved strongly enough to drive the mill-wheel. Marshall's workmen—ten Americans and ten Indians—cut lumber for huts and began building the sawmill. A millrace was dug to conduct water to the millwheel. In

order to widen and deepen it, the river was diverted into the millrace by means of wooden sluice gates. A delta of mud, gravel and sand accumulated each day at the lower end of the race, and Marshall had gotten into the habit of going down there each morning to see how much the current had accomplished during the night.

It was bright, cool and clear this Monday morning, the way it is up in the mountains in January. The river water struck a chill right through his boots as Marshall sloshed through it to shut off the water coming down the race.

"Twenty men workin' for me an' I got to do it all myself," he muttered as he turned the wheel to close the gates. "Lazy scuts!" The boys were all up at the camp, eating breakfast. They weren't much on work, Marshall thought, but they sure as hell could eat. He moved down along the race, inspecting the channel. His feet were getting colder.

"Damn river," he grumbled.

Towards the lower end of the millrace something glinting beneath the surface of the water caught his eye. It was a yellowy nugget. It looked like a piece of spruce gum with the teeth marks still in it.

"Never," Marshall said to himself. "Never!"

He picked up the little nugget, then another. They were about the size of peas. He laid them on a flat stone and got a heavy pebble off the river bed and pounded them. They didn't shatter or break as iron pyrites would have done.

"By God," Marshall breathed. His heart was bumping.

He sloshed out of the millrace and went over to the workshop near the mill. His hands were trembling as he took down a hammer and laid the nuggets on the anvil. He hammered them flat, then thick, then flat again. Marshall scratched his beard.

"Jesus," he said.

He went up to the camp and turned into the cook shed. It was warm and steamy inside. Jenny Wimmer looked up from her pots, eyebrows raised. The kitchen was her bailiwick, and she didn't like the men tramping in any time they felt the urge.

"Jenny," Marshall said, grinning nervously. "Do somethin' for me?"

"What's that?" she said, cautious. She and Mr. Marshall had a sort of an understanding.

"Look at these," Marshall said, showing her the nuggets.

"Aye?"

"I think it's gold, Jenny," Marshall whispered.

"Gold?" she said, interest aroused. She wiped her hands on her apron and came across to look, pushing the little nuggets around on his palm. She smelled nice, bacony, Marshall thought.

"Not much of it," she observed.

"Plenty more down in the river," Marshall said. "Look, boil it in your kettle with lye and some baking soda. Will you do that for me?"

"Well," she said. "I've a few other things—"

"It's important, Jenny," he said, earnestly.

"Everything's important to you men," she sniffed. "Feeding twenty hungry men's important, too, Mr. Marshall. I've no time for shilly-shally."

"Please, Jenny," he said. "Just do what I ask."

"Hmph," she said, but she took the nuggets. She was too bossy by half, and she had an edge on her tongue you could peel potatoes with, but deep down she was all right, Marshall thought. She would do it. Not that it made one cent's worth of difference whether she did or not. It was just one last precaution to make absolutely certain that he was right. James Marshall had been disappointed too many times in his life, and he wasn't going to be disappointed again.

It was gold. He knew it. It was gold.

* * *

BOOK ONE

1849-1856

If anyone had called Theodore Carver a romantic he would have laughed aloud at the idea and said that he was far too dry a stick to be called that. Perhaps joining the "gold rush" to California might look romantic, or even exciting, to his friends and relatives in Boston but Theo knew that he was not going west for romantic reasons. California was going to be a rich and booming place for the next few years, and that was why he was going: a man had to be where the opportunities were, and if it was a choice between the staid east and the wide-open west even a simpleton could make the decision to join the Argonauts and head for California.

"Common sense," he said. "There isn't an ounce of romance in it at all."

Just the same, he knew in his heart that it was an exciting, a romantic, prospect. He knew it from his younger brother Ezra's unconcealed envy, from the excited interest of his friends and the flattering admiration of some of the girls they knew. Taking passage into the unknown, crossing the still uncharted continent to countries which were to most people merely names on maps was a great adventure, and Theo had to admit—if only to himself and to Ez—that he was excited about it. It was the realization of a dozen youthful ambitions, not the least of which was finally to do something which Ezra could not either emulate or do better.

There were sleepless nights aplenty in their shared

room as they whispered to each other plans, fears, hopes. Was Theo afraid of such a journey? Suppose he was stranded in some remote jungle village, or wounded by natives with poisoned arrows, or marooned? What would he do if he got to El Dorado and found things the very opposite of all he hoped? Penniless, alone, without a friend or means of contacting the family, what would he do?

It would not happen, Theo said. He knew it, as he knew his own name. His journey to the gold fields would be a straightforward one—why, he already had his passage to Panama, and the papers were full of stories saying it was impossible to get passage there. The only imponderable was the fact that he had no passage booked between Panama City and California. Theo waved aside any fears his parents expressed on this matter. If the stories about how hard it was to get passage from New York to Panama were exaggerations, then by definition the stories about how hard it was to get from Panama to California were equally untrue.

“Six weeks from now,” he confidently predicted, “I’ll be setting up for business in Sacramento!”

Six weeks, he reflected sourly as he looked out at the tent city that housed the waiting army of travelers on the beach outside Panama City. That wasn’t just optimism, it was idiocy. The way things were going here on the isthmus it might very well be that long before they sighted another sail, and there were twenty men for every place on any ship that might appear. God, he thought, this is a filthy place.

Panama City had been bad, but the tent city outside the town was appalling. In the slanting, relentless tropical rain the men huddled like a defeated army in mildewed tents pitched in a sea of mud. Here and there a few oil lamps flickered; no fire would burn in that deluge. If there is a hell for optimists, Theodore Carver thought, this must be it. He felt a swift surge of anger, impatience. These men had set off from every corner of the world to get here, on their way to El Dorado, dubbing themselves Argonauts and exchanging stories of what they would do when they were millionaires. Now they sat listlessly in

fungus-spotted tents waiting for Providence to provide a miracle. Theo had no time for men like that: he knew one had to work and work hard for everything that was worth having. Old Hartwell Carver had impressed that precept upon his two sons all their lives: there was a price to be paid for everything worthwhile in life. There were no free rides.

"Whether it be for experience or for gain, you must expect to pay," he told Theo and Ezra. "You will pay with money or with sweat or with blood or with time, or with some combination of all these. But make no mistake, boys, you'll pay. So you'd better be sure of exactly what it is you want, and even more sure you want to pay the price of it!"

He had repeated the tenet often during their school years. Theo knew that Ezra didn't listen to Pa any more. He thought Pa's ideas were all out of date, and only just managed to keep his impatient contempt from showing. Theo often wondered whether Pa noticed Ezra's indifference. Somehow, Ezra's reaction made Theo want to support Pa more, as if he owed it to him to be loyal. He wondered how Pa and Ez would get along after he left for California.

Not too well, he thought, smiling at the memory of the uproar his announcement that he was going to California had created. It could not have been greater had he declared his intention of signing on as a mercenary in some obscure Balkan war. Below stairs, Cook threw her apron over her head and retired wailing to her pantry. It took Laura Carver the better part of an hour and several glasses of her husband's *amontillado* to console Mrs. Jepson and to convince her that Master Theo would neither be killed by "them there Injins," nor eaten alive by jungle cannibals on his way to the gold fields. Of the whole family only Dr. Carver championed his son's plans. California was to be the coming thing, he said, in his orotund "politician's" voice. He said a lot of other things, too, Theo remembered, things that had made Ezra squirm with visible impatience. Manifest Destiny, Pa had called it, Manifest Destiny drawing together the far-flung horizons of America. He prophesied that the gold found in the

mill-race on the American River would one day bring about the realization of his own lifelong dream, a trans-continental railroad.

"Think of it!" Pa had said, striking a declamatory pose, one finger held vertical, jaw up. "Think what a blessing that ribbon of steel would be today had Congress listened to Whitney and me when we first proposed it in 'thirty-two. By George, these Argonauts today would bless our names, our courage, every man Jack of them!"

The railroad had always been one of Pa's hobby-horses and, having heard him discussing it at every opportunity for most of his life, Theo had taken little notice of what Pa had said. Now, stranded in the thick, cloying damp heat of the Panama monsoon the idea of traveling across to California by train seemed like a heavenly dream.

There were only three ways to get to the gold fields. By ship around the Horn, overland by wagon train or—as Theo had come—by ship to the mouth of the Chagres River in Panama and then overland to Panama City to await a boat bound for California—any boat.

Theo had decided against going round the Horn because it took too long and because the risk of losing his freight was too high. What he was taking to California would be worth ten times what he had paid for it if he got it there intact. That profit would be his starting money, what the miners called a grubstake. For Theo California was not the end of the rainbow, but the beginning of a road. He planned to start business on the ground floor. Let others dig the gold; he would trade for it. Looking around him now at the squalor of the tent city, he knew he was going to succeed. He had ten times more push than the entire scurvy gang of them.

He supposed it had all started in school. By the time he left college Theo was regarded by many of his teachers as something of a prodigy, especially in matters pertaining to the exploration of the continent. Coronado, Mackenzie, La Salle, Lewis and Clark—put a blank outline of North America in front of Theo and he could plot their routes without hesitation. Ashley, Manuel Lisa, Jedediah Smith, Joseph Reddeford Walker, Zebulon Pike and William Becknell were names as familiar to him as those of his

school friends. He knew the routes they had charted as well as he knew the flora and fauna described and painted by the Bodmers and Audubons and the Thomas Nuttalls.

But of them all he admired John Charles Frémont most. The swashbuckling surveyor's *Report of the Exploring Expedition to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* had been published in Washington City on March 1, 1845. Theodore had consumed it probably more avidly than any of its other buyers, and was as enthusiastic about the prospects of the new country as the thousands who set out for Oregon later that year. Hartwell Carver believed—and thus, with their reservations expressed and dealt with, his sons believed—that in Oregon there could be major growth in industry and new business. As the elder son, it was more or less implicitly accepted in the family that Theo would be the one who went there. Training in the medical profession, following in their father's footsteps, held no attraction for either Theo or Ezra. If Dr. Carver was saddened by this fact, he accepted it as he accepted all of life's disappointments, in the resigned and humble belief that the Lord in His wisdom had made other plans.

Hartwell Carver had no cause to complain of many disappointments. A country doctor who had made his own small fortune in the moneyed houses of the Boston rich, Hartwell knew that the Lord had been good to him and he was not going to spit in His eye at this late stage of life. He had risen in Boston society. He had a fine house on Beacon Hill, servants, a beautiful wife, and two sturdy sons who had gone to Harvard College. If the leeching friends and relatives he'd left behind him on the landing-stage at Liverpool thirty years earlier could have seen him, none of them would have believed it.

"The tide is to the west," he said often. "To Oregon."

It was Manifest Destiny, as that old humbug from Missouri, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, called it.

When he had voiced his approval of Theo's plans his wife had crossed the room to his chair by the fireplace and bussed him soundly on the cheek.

"Heh, hem, haw," Hartwell said, flushing with pleasure. "Well now, madam, I'm disconcerted. That's what I am."

"Yes, dear," Laura said, smiling a little. She knew that Hartwell was pleased that he had pleased her; and if there was a faint shading of triumph in her smile there was no need for Hartwell to know it. For weeks Laura had been very carefully, and with infinite tact, making small suggestions as to Theo's plans. All of them had one end in view: to ensure that both her boys did not go to California together. Laura had her way, although she doubted that any of her men suspected for one moment that their plans had been in any way influenced by her wishes. Theo would go to California to start up a mercantile business, and Ezra would remain in the East as Theo's factotum and buyer. Everyone was pleased with the arrangements except Ezra.

"I think it's downright unfair that Theo should have all the fun just because he's the elder," Ezra said.

"Why, what's your hurry, Ez?" Theo said. "California will still be there in a year or two."

"A year or two?—" echoed Ezra. "You might as well say a century or two! If a fellow doesn't get out there soon there won't be anything left."

They thought he meant gold, and they laughed, humoring him. Let them, Ezra thought. He knew what he meant. Theo couldn't be the only man going west who'd had an education. They couldn't all be simpletons hoping to stumble over a hunk of gold the size of Faneuil Hall. There'd be men out there starting banks, buying land, opening up mercantile houses. There'd be gamblers and whores, too: all part of the same Manifest Destiny.

The truth was that Ezra was torn between wanting a big adventure, a wild leap into the great unknown, and his instinctive knowledge that roughing it for years in the mining camps was doing things the hardest way there was. His logical nature told him to let the fools take all the risks, as fools always had and always would. The clever ones would come in when the time was ripe, and make as much, or more, than those who had gone before. Mama and Pa seemed to think that being older automatically made Theo the smarter one, but Ezra knew that his brother was naïve, sentimental and soft. Yes, soft, Ezra

thought. Theo forgave easily, and forgot readily. He was an easy touch, and often taken advantage of. Nobody took advantage of Ezra. He knew what they said about him. Old beyond his years, more like forty-two than twenty-two. Hard as brass and twice as bold. He didn't care much. It was a reputation, he supposed; not a good one, but one that inspired respect. He had few friends, unlike Theo, who had dozens. He didn't care for any of Theo's acquaintances. They were all alike, including Theo, seeming to think there was something ennobling about hard work, and that the man who worked hard had to succeed. Only fools who knew nothing about the real world ever believed that kind of nonsense. Not Ezra Carver. There was no question in Ezra's mind as to what he wanted. He wanted to become rich. Not just wealthy, but rich enough to snap his fingers at anyone in the world if he wanted to. And that was going to take more than just honest hard work. The poor labored long and hard, and look where it got them. He had seen how the poor lived for their hard work and how the rich who did no work at all lived. Rich was better, and so one day he was going to be rich, too. He had never told anyone, not even Theo.

Let Theo go to California, he thought. I'll do just as well here, maybe even better. If all the clever fellows are rushing off to dig for gold, there'll be more chances among the dullards left behind. Let the fools take the risks, he told himself again and again. One or two of them may win, but only one or two.

Theo's ticket had been bought and paid for months before. It was now decided that the whole family would go up to New York to see Theo off. Pa was excited, talking incessantly about Theo's prospects, promising to reinforce the connections already made with traders and merchants in the Boston area. As soon as Theo could locate a good place in the gold fields he would open up a store. Ezra would buy goods on Theo's instructions with Pa as guarantor, then arrange for shipment out to California.

They had taken the best advice they could get, which

was pretty thin stuff. They had concluded that the staples at the mines would be tools, agricultural implements, woolens and clothing of all kinds, firearms, patent medicines and canned food. Theo purchased a stock of medicines and guns and bales of socks and underwear to take out with him, the bulk dictated by his choice of route. They watched his cargo swung aboard the paddle-steamer by stone-faced winchers. The ticket office on Fourteenth Street was run by a hulking fellow in a striped shirt and wide, patterned braces who spat with offensive regularity in the general direction of a bespattered spittoon, and who treated them with the offhand disinterest of a slaughterer in an abattoir.

"What about passage from Panama City to San Francisco?" Theo asked. "Can I book that here?"

"All sold out," the man said, without a trace of regret in his voice. He had long since run out of regret and everything else. People were offering him six, ten times the price of tickets as far as Chagres. After a day at the steamship offices he would go home to his wife in Jackson Heights and tell her he was convinced that the world had gone mad. Yes, John, she would say, and make his dinner.

Theo fought his way up the gangplank and found a place at the rail to wave good-bye. At first he could not pick out his parents in the crush ashore, and then he saw Pa waving a red kerchief and Mama crying. "O, Susanna, don't you cry for me," they were singing somewhere, "I'm off to California with a washpan on my knee."

A man came along the deck banging a dented gong, shouting: "All aboard that's coming aboard, all ashore that's going ashore!" Men were hugging each other, kissing their wives, sweethearts, mothers. Tears were shed, promises made, hands shaken, backs pounded. Small children wailed. The boat pulled away into the Hudson, but the harbor was so crowded with small boats that it took a long time until they were far enough away from the dock to see the panorama of Manhattan stretching up towards the fields of Harlem. There was a series of loud hoots from the funnel of the boat and then Theo felt the insistent tremor of the turning screws. The water at the

stern of the ship boiled foamy gray-white, and they were under way.

The rooftops of Manhattan dropped below the horizon and the sandy beaches of Staten Island slid past. The open sea lay ahead. Theo felt an immediate sense of anticlimax. On his way to California he might be; he was also, for the first time in his life, entirely alone. His fellow passengers were already huddling in groups, smoking on black clay pipes, jabbering ceaselessly of gold, gold, gold. They talked of what they would buy when they got rich in California. A big house for that one, a fine set of racing trotters for this, and so on. They were simpletons, just as Ez had said, Theo thought. They knew nothing of the difficulty of amassing money and even less of the real job, which was keeping it. They really seemed to think they were going to find it lying on the ground in California, waiting to be picked up like a dropped purse. None of them seemed to have even given a thought to what the thousands already out there were doing with their eyes.

On the second day out Theo learned that Mrs. Frémont was on board. He could not believe his luck. Diligent inquiry among the stewards confirmed that it was true: Mrs. Frémont was traveling to California to join her husband. General Frémont was shortly to conclude his fourth expedition to the Far West, charting the route of a proposed transcontinental railroad. Theo knew all about that: Pa had talked of little else from the day that Frémont's expedition had been announced.

Theo spent the next day daydreaming, imagining meeting his boyhood hero thanks to some service he had performed for Mrs. Frémont on board ship. He saw himself protecting her from some drunken lout, gallant but firm. He saw himself saving her from falling overboard in heavy weather, strong, reliable. They were only daydreams. Jessie Benton Frémont was traveling first class, totally out of his reach: steerage passengers were forbidden to enter the first-class section.

A couple of days later Theo caught a glimpse of Mrs. Frémont walking on the promenade deck above, a wil-

lowy beauty with hair as black as the wings of a raven. A small child walked beside her, holding hands. That must be her daughter, Elizabeth, Theo thought, the one she calls Lily. He felt as though he already knew them both. Jessie Frémont was the daughter of Senator "Manifest Destiny" Benton, the wife of the man over whose every written word Theo had pored a dozen times. He could not count the times he had fallen asleep over Frémont's accounts of the fabled sights of the Far West. He—like thousands of others—knew the story of how the dashing young Lieutenant Frémont had won the seventeen-year-old daughter of the Senator, knew that Jessie was Frémont's "topographical reporter," wife, amanuensis, and ghost writer. She was the second of Senator Benton's five surviving children and his favorite. She had grown up in Washington, where she had often visited President Jackson with her father. She had been educated at Miss English's Academy in that city. She spoke French and Spanish; she was delicate, dark-eyed, charming and beautiful. In this year of grace 1849 she was twenty-five years of age.

The *Orion* reached Chagres on Friday, March 23, and hove to beneath the frowning battlements of Castel's San Lorenzo, anchoring about a mile from the shore. Everyone was in a clamor to get off, but there was no hurrying the shore boats. The sailors told them they wouldn't get off until morning, so Theo concentrated upon getting his freight together so that it wouldn't be dumped unceremoniously all over the muddy shore he could see.

In the morning several shore boats, all pulled by Americans, came out through the torrential rain to take them in. There was a sullen, heavy swell and getting into the small boats was not easy: more than one man fell into the sea doing it. They crossed the bar at the mouth of the river, pitching through the angry rollers with the "pilots" holding on to their tillers for dear life, and got off on the muddy bank of the Chagres River as wet as if they had swum ashore. A swarm of jabbering, gesticulating boatmen rushed towards them, Americans and local natives, Jamaican Negroes, all shouting prices for the journey upriver to Cruces. As for Chagres itself, it was built on both

banks of the river, a miserable cesspool of a place that stank of rotting offal, a scatter of palm-thatched cane-and-mud houses and one or two wooden houses looking almost as wretched. The place was abuzz with insects. Atop the bluff on the south side of the river the castle loomed, swathed in creepers and half-hidden by the foliage of palm trees.

It took them three days to get to Gorgona, three torpid, sweating, eventless days in the thick, damp heat of the jungle.

Strange sounds, completely foreign to the ear, came from the dense shadows. Brightly colored birds flickered through the muggy air, squawking in alarm. At night clouds of mosquitoes descended upon the unprotected bodies of the travelers, feasting so relentlessly that by morning some of the less fortunate ones were as black and blue as if they had been physically beaten, with huge welts appearing wherever their skin was exposed.

It was too damp to smoke, and there was nothing to eat. They could do nothing but wait out each night and start again the next day as before. Parrots, monkeys and alligators soon lost their novelty. Nobody even bothered to shoot at them after the middle of the second day. As they ascended the river its current grew stronger and their progress proportionately slower. The two Indians were more indolent than ever. Theo tried to get them to push the *bongo* faster; he might as well have been asking a corpse to dance.

By the time they reached Gorgona many of the men were complaining of aches, pains and fevers. Some of them already had dysentery and Theo was not cheered by the news that there had been an outbreak of cholera at Gorgona only a week before. Despite the conditions he felt strong and well.

Gorgona was just another huddle of cane shanties with palmleaf roofs that slanted up to a great height so as to shed the rain. There was a large canvas house on which were painted the words "Gorgona Hotel." Its proprietor was American, one of the ugliest brutes Theo had ever clapped eyes on, but the meal of beans, eggs, plantains and ham he served was welcome, if murderously expensive.

The promised mules were waiting, swaybacked, sore-backed and downright recalcitrant. They had to be goaded every step of the twenty miles over the mountains and down to Panama City. The trail was narrow and rough, and full of potholes and slideaways. Every few miles they passed the decomposing body of a mule that had died or been shot, its innards torn out by the omnipresent buzzards, clouds of flies competing for what was left with revolting globs of white maggots.

In the mountains it began to rain again. It took another two endless, slogging, wet days to get to Panama City. Many of the men who had started out from Chagres at the same time as Theo's party had fallen behind, some of them very ill. Not a few, Theo guessed, would come down with cholera from drinking the rum thinned with river water that the Indians sold to them.

They came over a long, low slope and then the dense curtain of trees opened up and Theo could see the sprawl of the walled city, the white tower of the cathedral dominating the huddled red-roofed buildings clustered around it. All along the walls of the town, and all the way down to the beaches, the shanties and tents of the Americans were pitched. They sat in huddled, waterlogged misery beneath makeshift plank roofs, pup tents, sometimes nothing but haphazardly stitched rubber ponchos. There were even one or two dens—they couldn't even be called shanties, they were so poor—made of chopped down bamboo sticks. They were about as effective in keeping out the rain as a sieve would have been. The men in them stared out at Theo like miserable animals caught in some dreadful menagerie. He had never seen such misery.

The town itself was built on a small promontory, protected on the two sides facing the sea by batteries, and on the landward side by wall and moat. It had been founded in 1519, destroyed by Henry Morgan in 1671—hence the wall, erected when the city was rebuilt about five miles west of its earlier site. In Theo's time the town sprawled outside the old wall, the houses mostly two-story wooden affairs painted in bright colors, with a veranda on the upper story. There were some more imposing stone

houses, others of brightly painted adobe. Crudely lettered signs advertised beds, food, gambling, saloons. The women advertised themselves. The prices were astronomical. There were chickens and goats in the streets, seemingly oblivious of the rain. The uneven cobbled surface was slick with animal droppings and mud. Theo made his way to the central plaza appalled at the misery of his fellow Argonauts.

What was needed in Panama City was some organization, he decided. These poor fellows had no one to turn to, and so were at the mercy of any dago cutthroat. Theo had been keeping his eyes open on the road up from Chagres. There were plenty of places back there where rush matting could be bought, and fresh fruit, and halfway decent meat. There were fish in the rivers if you could persuade the Indians to catch them for you, and ranches where provisions and lengths of Indian cloth, primitive but sound, could be had for pennies.

He wandered around the town asking questions. There were about two and a half thousand Americans in Panama City awaiting passage to the gold fields. The locals—black, brown, or white, Negro, Indian, Spanish—numbered about eight thousand. The principal articles of food were ham, beans, chicken, eggs and rice. There was beef; they said it was handy for mending your boots, but not much else.

It would be a long time before there were two thousand berths available for California, Theo thought. Meanwhile, many of those men would die of exposure, disease or starvation. Theo decided to wait no longer. A reputation for fair dealing won here, where every Indian *carbron* was trying to gouge extra dollars from the travelers, would stand him in good stead in California.

He went from shanty to shanty, all around the beaches, meeting incoming arrivals and others who had been on the beach a month or more, taking orders from them for such goods as he felt sure he could obtain and deliver. He sold his stock of patent medicines at one thousand per cent profit within an hour of beginning: some of the men would have taken arsenic on the offchance that it might

do some good. Dozens had malaria, dozens more cholera. There was a rumor that someone had come down with smallpox. Many of the men had been guzzling the local rum until their brains were like porridge, seeking any kind of surcease from the relentlessly filthy monotony of Panama City. Gambling, drinking and cockfighting were the principal amusements: there were frequent drunken brawls involving the use of pistols or Bowie knives.

For a day or so Theo felt slightly guilty about trading at a profit. It was as though he were some kind of leech battenning on to the misfortune of the travelers, for whom he felt great sympathy. Gradually, however, his guilt was replaced by something not unlike anger. If he did not exploit them, someone else much less fair-minded than he would do it anyway. They were just sitting there, sheep waiting to be shorn. A man ought not to let the world run over him, Theo thought. Nothing was ever achieved by a man who sat lamenting that it was all out of his hands, it wasn't his fault, it wasn't up to him, things were against him. It was when things went against him that you found out what a fellow was made of. Most of these men had no sand in their craws, Theo decided, which was their misfortune and his opportunity. He set to work with a will.

"If anyone ever tells you how lucky you are," Hartwell Carver told his sons, "you tell them this: that you find by and large that the harder you work, the luckier you get." It was an adage that had stuck in Theo's mind. Thereafter he never believed in luck, good or bad. He believed that if you worked hard you would have a better chance of doing well than if you didn't. And he never worked harder than those weeks in Panama. He learned from someone in town that there was a rotting schooner lying unused on the nearby Rio Obispo, and decided to go and find it. He hired an Indian to guide him down there, fired with the idea that, if he could refit the ship, he could not only get up to the gold fields right away but make a profit on the trip to boot. The Indian led him impassively through the dense jungle. It was thirty-nine miles to where the schooner lay, and when they got there Theo found that she was much too small to consider using for a sea voyage as long as that from Panama City to San Francisco. He had never been so disappointed.

Determined not to waste his effort, he decided to use the schooner as a supply ship. The Indian, whom Theo had only half-jokingly dubbed Friday, acted as his interpreter in the nearby villages. Theo bought all the food the native would sell to him, together with bolts of the cheap native cloth; the astonished Indians sold him their goods for pennies. Theo hired three of the strongest-looking of the men as crew for the trip back up the coast to

Panama City. It took him five days to get the old hulk up there, five endless, waterless, sunstruck days in which one of the Indians died and the other two jumped ship; but Theo and Friday made it.

Theo sold everything he had bought up the coast before he had even unloaded it. He set off immediately on another trip down to the Rio Obispo, but this time with three of the Boston men who had come out on the *Orion* as crew. In the next few weeks they made eight trips, at the end of which Theo had made a net profit of nearly three thousand dollars, with as much again shared among his crew.

There was still no sign of a boat bound for California, and conditions in Panama City had deteriorated from wretched to dreadful. Theo learned that Jessie Frémont had malaria. She was being cared for at the home of the *alcalde*, Don Félipe Alvarez y Cordoba. It was a big white house on the hill behind the cathedral, with wrought-iron gates and a courtyard in which white doves strutted like royalty. Taking his courage in both hands, Theo presented his compliments to the *alcalde* and asked after the health of Mrs. Frémont.

"It is kind of you to ask," the old man said. "Señora Frémont is being well cared for."

"I never doubted it for one second, Don Félipe," Theo said, matching the Spanish gravity and politeness. "I merely came to see whether there might be something that you need for Señora Frémont that I could bring. I understand that fresh fruit juice is helpful where there is fever."

"Fresh fruit juice, Señor?" Don Félipe said, raising his eyebrows in surprise at such folly. "And where would we find such a miracle? Panama is overrun by thousands of men with malaria, all of them seeking some remedy. Any of them would give you whatever you ask for such a luxury as one orange. How do you propose that one should go about finding this fresh fruit juice which you so confidently recommend?"

Theo smiled at the old man's polite scorn and spread his hands wide. "I don't know, sir. Perhaps you would permit me to see what I can do?"

"If you wish, Señor Carver," the *alcalde* said. "You alone know how much time you have upon your hands."

It was dismissive and unfavorable, but it was the best Theo could hope for and he left the big house determined to show the old man that even the impossible was possible when someone wanted to do it badly enough. He spent the next two days scouring Panama City for fresh fruit, but to no avail. He might have been trying to find the gold they had all come for. Men laughed in his face, calling him fourteen kinds of fool, but his request was so unusual that it was remembered. One night a whey-faced fellow with a marked Southern accent sidled up to Theo in the plaza, asking if his name was Carver.

"It is," Theo said. "What can I do for you?"

"It's moah whut Ah c'd do fer you, mister," the man said, his voice a whine. "Ah heerd you's lookin' fer fresh oranges, thet right?"

"What of it?"

"If I's ter point y'at some, what'd it be worth t'me?"

"If you're right, and it's fresh fruit," Theo said, "I'll give you ten dollars."

"Twenny," the man said.

"Ten now," Theo said. "Ten more if you're telling the truth."

He followed the man to a point on the northwest corner of the city wall. They went to a lean-to that looked as though it had but recently been erected, and inside Theo found a young fellow of about his own age, set up nicely with warm clothes and a bit of a fire going in a makeshift fireplace made from stones off the beach. Theo's guide told the man Theo's name, and they shook hands.

"I'm Collis Huntington," the man said. "Glad to know you."

"I hear you have some oranges," Theo said.

"That's right," Huntington replied. "Fellow came in from Chagres last night. Brought six oranges with him. I bought them off him."

"And you'll sell them to me?"

"I might."

"How much?"

"I don't need money," Huntington said. "I'm well fixed."

"They're for someone very sick," Theo said.

"Everyone's sick," Huntington said.

"What then?" Theo asked. "What do you want?"

"I might need a partner," Huntington replied. "I aim to set up in Sacramento. I'll need someone to help me out. Someone I can rely on."

"Me?"

"I've heard about you, Carver. They say you've got push. I like that in a man."

"Sorry," Theo said. "I'm not looking for work."

"You might be one day."

"It's possible," Theo allowed. "But not now."

"Pity," Huntington said. "You're my style of man."

"Sorry," Theo repeated. He felt disappointed and it showed on his face. Huntington said nothing for a moment or two. He was a big fellow, Theo realized, now that his eyes were used to the dim light in the lean-to, maybe two hundred pounds, with hands too small for his massive body, and a head too big. His eyes were gray and searching. Huntington had a thin-bridged nose and a thick, cropped black beard.

"About the oranges," he said, finally.

"What about them?"

"Take them anyway. I'd say you'll use them in a good cause."

"I don't know what to say," Theo said, and it was true.

"Don't say anything, then," Huntington replied. "Just remember you owe me a favor."

"If I can ever repay you and it is within my power. . . ."

"All right," Huntington said. "I may hold you to that."

"Thank you," Theo said. "Thank you very much."

"See you in California."

Theo took the oranges and rushed across town, where he presented himself at the door of the big house on the hill. A smiling maid led him into a cool hall with a tiled floor. He could hear the doves cooing outside. Through the window he could see the tower of the cathedral, its covering of pearl-oyster shells gleaming in the sunlight.

After a while he heard the sound of a woman's voice and then a dark, handsome lady of perhaps fifty years came into the hall.

"I am Doña Maria Alvarez," she said. "My husband is not here, Señor. How can I assist you?"

Theo held out the little box with the oranges in it.

"These are for Mrs. Frémont," he blurted. "I told your husband that I would get them for her."

The *alcalde's* wife looked up at Theo's face. Understanding lit her dark, sensitive eyes.

"Ah, the *Americano*," she said softly. "My husband spoke of you. He said you were so sure you could do the impossible, like all *Yanquis*. He was sure that you would fail."

"Will you see that Mrs. Frémont gets them?"

"Of course, of course," Doña Maria said, taking the box.

"How is she?"

"Much better, I am happy to say. I think that the fever is breaking."

"I would very much like to present my compliments to her when she is able to receive visitors," Theo said.

"And so you shall," Doña Maria said, smiling and touching his arm softly, sympathetically, with her long, tapering fingers. He was so young, she thought. They were all so young. "Come to see me tomorrow and I will endeavor to arrange something."

"Tomorrow," Theo said, his heart pounding. "I'll come at about four, if that is permissible?"

"*Bueno*," said the *alcalde's* wife. "And now, if you will forgive, I will return to my patient. *Hasta mañana, señor. . . ?*"

"Carver," Theo said. "Theodore Carver, at your service, señora. *Hasta la vista*," he added, and he had never meant anything more fervently in his life. He walked back down the hill to the beach in a haze of anticipation. Tomorrow he would actually talk to Jessie Frémont. He could not believe his luck.

That same night the cannon boomed, at two in the morning, to announce the arrival of the steamers *Panama*

and *California*. The preferential treatment due to so prominent a lady was given as a matter of course to Jessie Frémont, and she sailed the following day without ever having seen Theo. It was well into May before he was able to secure passage to the gold fields.

They finally sailed from Acapulco on the seventeenth of July and saw Yerba Buena Bay open up before them on August 30th. They had been at sea for more than a hundred days, and the men crowded to the rails to see the tranquil, hill-circled bay. It was a delight to behold. They worked southwards past rocky islands to the sparkling roadstead between the shore and Yerba Buena, the pretty little mile-long island in the center of the inlet. San Francisco itself, however, was another matter.

Strewn on the beach and scattered up over the hills behind, it was a wilderness of shanties and tents, dwarfed by the few remaining adobes of the original Spanish settlers and the raw, new, lumber boxes around Portsmouth Square. Everything looked flimsy, flyblown and filthy.

Nobody was more anxious to get moving than Theo. He was already nearly three months behind his original schedule, and knew that back home they would all be indulging in the worst sort of fears on his behalf. The filthy, dusty sprawl of San Francisco held little attraction for him. He walked up to Portsmouth Square, jostled every inch of the way by the seething mob of men. Rootless, young, insecure, womanless and rash, many of them were fresh ashore like Theo. Some had suffered even worse voyages than he, hard though it was to believe. Many more were just down from the diggings with more money in their pockets than most of them had ever seen in their lives or ever would again. But in San Francisco

there was precious little to spend it on and so they milled about, adrift like sail-less barques, looking for a friendly face or a bright light in the dark streets. Theo was astonished by the mess and the waste and the dirt. He made tracks away from the saloons as soon as he could; he needed neither the delights of the Parker House's breakfasts nor the ministrations of the worn houris in the upstairs rooms. "They think only of gambling here," he wrote to Ezra that night, "and they do it day and night, without a stop. Most of the city center is given over to gambling halls and games of chance. These support fine buildings, but ordinary businessmen have to manage with leaky boxes with canvas roofs and in some cases even cloth houses. I know it is hard for you to conceive of living and eating and sleeping and working in a "house" measuring twenty feet square and made of cloth lined with paper, yet here it is normal. Some do their trade on the unprotected beaches. How they survive defies the imagination."

He told them he was well, and that he was moving on right away. Then he hurried down to the post office and made arrangements for the letter to leave on the next packet. He retrieved his gear and swung out on foot for North Beach. He knew that every extra minute his cargo lay on the ramshackle quay in San Francisco it was at risk. He also knew that hiring someone to freight the stuff upriver to the gold fields might very well cost more money than the goods themselves would fetch. He wondered when his former shipmates and the men from Boston who had come out with him on the *Orion* would begin their journey to the gold fields. Once ashore, they had abandoned all sense of discipline and camaraderie. It was every man for himself in California.

At North Beach he saw a man struggling to load crates and bales on to a schooner tied alongside a makeshift pier jutting out into the water. The boat rose and fell like a dory in a gale, and the man was cursing fluently. Theo hurried along the pier to him.

"Give you a hand?" he offered.

"Can't pay," the man grunted, without looking up. "Sling your hook."

"Where you headed?"

"Sacramento, if it's any concern o' yours," the man said, straightening up and putting his hands on the small of his back. He spat at Theo's feet.

"I'll make you a deal," Theo said. "I'll load for you at a dollar an hour. That's low pay in these parts, I'm told."

"That it is, for sure," the man said. "What's the catch?"

"Throw in a place for me and my truck on your boat as far as Sacramento. I'll pay you normal freight rates. No impost."

It was a good offer, Theo knew that much. You couldn't get a man to work for less than ten dollars an hour in San Francisco, he'd been told. Finding one who'd work at all was next to impossible. The going rate for carrying one suitcase from the long quay to Portsmouth Square was two dollars.

"I'll go you that," the man said, sticking out a gnarled hand scarred by years of handling ropes, bales, boats. "Sam Catlow's the name."

"Theodore Carver," Theo said. "When do I start?"

"No time like the present," Catlow said, and jerked a thumb at the stacked bales.

Gulls screeched over their wake as the schooner slid across the bay. Low brown hills slipped by on the port side, and the water grew choppy as they drew nearer to the delta of the Sacramento River. Catlow danced about at the wheel, keeping a weather eye on the maze of channels, cursing at the mosquitoes that came at them in clouds making a noise like a faraway buzz saw. The heat was dead and flat, and as they left the open water behind them it got hotter. They passed through land golden with ripe oats. Far beyond, the hills looked like sleeping lions.

Sacramento lay on a stretch of land inside an arm of the American River where it looped north before joining the larger Sacramento River. Theo's heart lifted at the sight of the town, shaded by tall cottonwoods and golden sycamores. This was the place: not far from here, on the south fork of the American at Coloma, James Marshall had found the first gold. There, on a bluff above the landing-stage, perhaps two miles from the river, stood Sutter's Fort. Everyone knew the story of Sutter. He was a Swiss who'd gone out there and got a grant of land from the Mexicans. His real name was Suter. He hired Jim Marshall to build a sawmill on the south fork of the American, and Marshall got down to it in January 1848. While digging a channel for the tailrace—the watercourse which would turn the mill wheel—Marshall had noticed something metallic glinting in the water. That was the gold which had started the rush. They said that there were now up-

wards of ten thousand men working the south fork of the American alone.

The heat was suffocating. Theodore helped Catlow tie up the boat at the riverside just below the City Hotel. He shook hands with the gruff old sailor and promised to pick up his truck in a couple of hours.

"Wouldn't want a regular job, would 'ee?" Catlow asked, squinching up his eyes to conceal the mischief in them.

"No, thanks," Theo said, smiling. "I plan to set up on my own."

"Good luck to you," Catlow said.

"I can use some," Theo said, and set off along Front Street, past the Eagle Theater and across J Street. Hordes of tents and makeshift shanties sheltered in the shadow of the more solid buildings. There were dodgers everywhere proclaiming the forthcoming opening of a paddle-steamer service between Sacramento and San Francisco. Theo stopped and asked a passerby directions to the nearest express office.

"There's three, four, up along J Street," the man said. "Y' cain't miss 'em."

"Is it always this hot up here?" Theo asked.

"Cain't tell," the man said. "Ain't been here that long m'self. But a feller told me it was a hunnerd ten up in Auburn. Said she ain't rained up here since March. Mebbe that's why."

He slouched away through the ankle-deep red dust, which puffed up behind him like gunsmoke. Theo bent down and sifted a handful of the dust through his fingers; it was as fine as talcum. Pray God it doesn't get windy up here, he thought.

On his way to the express office Theo stopped in a couple of saloons, listening to the talk, picking up pointers. Every single place he went into was packed solid with miners. Theo smiled a lot and nodded in a friendly fashion; he hardly talked at all. A man never learned a damned thing while he was wagging his jaw, Pa always said.

Theo knew that the best way to get the feel of the place, the insider's knowledge, was to listen. He took a room at

the Pomona House, and for the next two days went without haste from saloon to exchange to hotel lobby to express office, asking questions, listening carefully to what men said. He learned that there was a busy new route through the mountains. After the experience of the Donner party a couple of years earlier, when the few pitiful survivors had been reduced to cannibalism, the California trail through Truckee was growing unpopular. The Carson route, as the new trail was called, skirted the southern edge of Lake Tahoe, crossing the Divide at Echo Summit and dropping down from that seven-thousand-foot-high pass through Desolation Valley, Hangtown, and then on to Sacramento. Theo spent a lot of time pumping the owner of the Pomona House, a man named Philander Hunt who needed little encouragement to launch into full spate on the subject of anything he had ever heard in his entire life. He was as much a born gossip as Theo was a born listener, so they got along famously, despite the twenty-year difference in their ages. Philander—he preferred to be called Phil because, as he put it, “I don’t care for the kind of jokes my full name elicits from the riff-raff one encounters up here”—said he knew all the best wholesalers in town, and promised to introduce Theo to them. He was as good as his word, conducting Theo along J Street from establishment to establishment, telling the local men that Theo was settling in to do business in a tidy sort of way. The local businessmen looked Theo over with the eyes of sharks.

Theo decided to take the goods he had brought with him from the East and go up to the area known as Dry Diggings. It was fairly new and raw up there, they said, and most of the mining was placering. Everyone seemed to think the place might buck up considerably once the rains came and they had water. Mining was at its most difficult now, with the drought. Everyone was waiting for the late summer rains: farmers, miners, everyone.

Theo went up into the mountains, following the valley of the American. He saw plenty of quail, their two long crest feathers quivering with the nervous motion of their heads as they ran between rocks and bushes. There was a large cage full of them at one of the wayside stations he

passed. At night the camp fires of the emigrant wagons glowed like rubies strung all along the mountain slopes. By day he watched the new arrivals heading down towards Sacramento, made gaunt by the deserts, flaking with scurvy. Their eyes were always alight with hope, as if they were sustained by that alone. Every one of them asked the same question or some variant of it: "Is it far now to the Sacramento valley?" "How many more miles to Sutter's Fort, mister?"

After his first exploratory trip—he sold everything he had brought with him inside an hour of setting up his stand—Theo decided to go back to Sacramento for more goods. He reasoned that, if he caught the emigrants before they got down to the valley, they were likelier to buy, having less choice but much more time. He set to work, and spent the next two months shuttling regularly between the Dry Diggings, Hangtown and Echo Summit. He opened up three trading posts, manning them as goods became available that he could sell in each, running himself ragged to keep a constant stock coming in. It was completely trial and error—finding out what the miners wanted and what they could happily struggle along without. Until he had sufficient feel of the market Theo had no intention of risking large sums in goods to be freighted to California from the East.

At the end of three months he began to see a small profit on his labors, and this spurred him to even greater efforts. He was managing on about four hours' sleep a night, spending up to eight hours of every day in the seven slogging across the desolate hills from tent camp to shanty town, from the Dry Diggings to Weaverville and Riverton and Dutch Flat and You Bet and Gold Run on the old Truckee Trail. The rains came. Through the sloping mud Theo trudged, leading his pack mules, bringing new washpans and woolen shirts to the men in the hills, dry socks, pickaxe heads. He spent Christmas working flat out in the tent store he'd raised in Weaverville, selling every single thing he had in the place because the boys were all out to get each other little gifts, some small thing to bring the spirit of the season into their mudcaked, sore-footed, bowed-backed, callous-handed lives. There was a

big run on the plum duff, and Theo wondered if anyone but he saw the irony in making profits from the one staple of life on the ships bound for California about which every single passenger bitterly complained. He stayed open until midnight each night, busy beneath the hissing lamps, ignoring the long, slow surges of pure pain that rose from his heels to his shoulders to merge with the dull, thick pounding at the base of his neck, the bleary blur behind his eyes. On the 26th he collapsed in the muddy tracks outside his tent with a temperature of 104°. A couple of friendly miners dragged him inside, and somehow he got himself into bed. He was there for a fortnight.

He drank whisky laced with quinine, honey and hot water, was plagued with cramps and sweats, sleeping fitfully and listening to the ceaseless drumming of the endless rain on the roof of his tent. Sometimes he felt strong enough to curse his body for being so helpless. At others he was hardly able to groan with the pains he was suffering. The rains fell interminably. Everything was damp to the touch, clammy. His boots by the bedside turned gray-white and a purse he had brought with him from home rotted and fell apart. Once in a while one of the boys would look in to see if he was dead yet; they had a gallows humor. They told him he ought to go down to Sacramento, where there was a hospital of sorts. Theo shook his head; he had no intention of paying the kind of bills doctors out here charged. Fifty dollars would buy you a bottle of medicine—whatever they had, cough medicine, purgative, it made no odds. If you wanted a consultation, it was ten times that much. It was cheaper to die. Theo grinned weakly at the thought; maybe he was getting a bit of gallows humor himself.

When he finally got back on his feet his weight was down from 160 to 104 pounds, and his legs were as rickety as those of a newborn colt. He tottered outside into the pouring rain. The track through the center of the camp was a mess of glutinous mud two feet deep. Some wag had posted a sign: WAGON AND SIX MULES LOST HERE.

Theo made himself some hot tea, and waited outside on the porch until he saw Sam Marks, a miner he knew slightly. He called out and Marks came over. He was a

short, heavily built man with the sorrowful expression of one who has witnessed much folly.

"Well," he said, "I see you ain't dead, Theo."

"Not dead," Theo said, managing a grin, "but as near it as makes no matter."

"You ain't missed no trade, anyways," Sam said. "Diggin's is unworkable. Ever'body's just settin' an' waitin' an' cussin' the rain."

"They were praying for it a couple of months back."

"Aye," Sam said. He dug out a blackened old clay pipe and lit it. It stank and Theo said so. The old miner grinned unrepentantly.

"Old rope," he chuckled. "On'y thing I got that'll smoke. Can't afford baccy, anyways."

He told Theo that none of the miners had any money. The little cash that was around was crossing the gambling tables and saloon bars, not the counters of stores. Sam's news only strengthened Theo's decision to get out of the diggings and back to Sacramento while there was still something left of the season.

He rose early the following day and bargained with a man named Gates for a pair of mules and a wagon. The mules were gaunt and unfed, but healthy. Gates, who came from Wisconsin, was in desperate straits but he wasn't so far gone that he'd let the team go for nothing. They finally struck a bargain and Theo paid him in cash. Gates squelched off through the mud without so much as a thank-you. Before Theo had even untied the mules from the hitching rail Gates was turning into the Empire Saloon, the dollars burning a hole in his pocket.

The roads were in very bad shape, and it took Theo nearly four days to get down to Sacramento. He had decided on his new course of action, leaving his goods in store with Burwell, Boley and Murphy at the Miners' Store in Hangtown for the time being. He knew now he had been in too much of a hurry to make a killing, and had spread himself too thinly trying to do it. The mining camps were all fly-by-night places, the miners as unreliable as gnats. Let there be a rumor of a strike elsewhere, and half of the inhabitants of a place vanished overnight, your trade with them. Let there be a heavy storm and the

place became marooned, the diggings unworkable, and the miners a penniless and discounted rabble mooching about, asking for credit that no sane man would ever extend to them.

No, Theo had concluded; he would find a place and open up business in Sacramento, as a jobber perhaps. He'd probably need to take in a partner, because his capital was low and rents in frenzied Sacramento sky high: a lot on J or K Streets would cost the best part of \$2,000 a year, forty dollars a week to be found good times or bad, rain or shine.

The night he got back to Sacramento it began to rain again. The following day the river burst its banks. The valleys were inundated by six feet of mud-thick water. Many men were drowned, how many nobody knew; they simply disappeared, never to be seen again. Thousands lost everything they owned; everything movable, everything perishable, was destroyed by the irresistible water. Life in Sacramento turned from hardship to nightmare. Drunken real-estate speculators set up mad businesses on rooftops, screeching prices at prospective customers going by in rowboats, selling land still six feet under water. They flailed about in pirogues and dories, smacking into submerged obstacles and spilling themselves into the red-brown water. The price of fresh meat rocketed to twenty dollars a pound. Rogues from the town went out and slaughtered some of Sutter's cattle where they were grazing on the hillsides, and hawked the bloody meat through the town for whatever it would fetch.

Theo watched from an upstairs window of the Pomona House with lackluster eyes that saw hardly any of what was happening. The valley was devastated. As far as the eye could see it was one vast muddy lake, its surface broken only by protruding branches of trees along the old river bank, or the occasional drunkenly slanting roof. Scores of small boats plied hither and yon like berserk insects. Men shouted hoarsely across the flat, echoing water. None of it interested Theo. He was down, beaten, through, and he knew it. Everything he owned was up in the mountains, and he had no way of getting to it.

"There's nothing left, Phil," he said to Hunt. "I've lost

the wagon and the mules, and I can't get to my goods. I've nothing to set up with and nowhere to do it even if I had. I can't get up to the mountains to redeem my stuff. They'll sell it before I can. I can't wait for a shipment from the East, and I don't have the money to wait anyway."

"How much have you got?" Hunt asked. "Or would you rather not say?"

"I don't mind telling you," Theo said. "I've got about a thousand in cash, plus my goods up at Hangtown—for the moment. Say two thousand more altogether."

"Not much," Phil observed.

"I know it," Theo said. "What's really annoying is that I could have made a go of it if I'd got that lot on K Street."

"Could you run to it—eighteen hundred a year?"

"I could do it," Theo said. "But then I'd have no capital to build with. Not a penny."

"So you're giving up?"

"I can't see what else to do."

"You could borrow."

"Aye," Theo said with a rueful smile. "Or throw myself to the sharks."

It was always at times like those that a man needed money, and it was always at times like those that it was hardest to borrow. The interest rates would go up around ten per cent per month until conditions got back to normal. Theo didn't want that kind of deadweight on his back. 120 per cent interest a year put you effectively in debt forever. He had no intention of spending the rest of his life working for moneylenders.

"What will you do?" Philander Hunt asked.

"I don't know yet," Theo said.

Now he gazed out of the window at the featureless water, and then at the long line of hills to the east. He thought of his months of backbreaking toil up in the diggings, the rotting, mildewed tent in which he had nearly died, the exhausted faces of the miners who had been his customers. He thought of all the times he had walked through the burning hills with blistered feet and his

tongue swollen with thirst. Anger rose in him and he banged his big fist down on the window sill.

"No, by God!" he said. "I won't be beat!"

He stood up. All at once he felt strong, certain. He had a stake—more money than many a man who'd worked his guts out in the mines for a year—and he was still young and full of strength. This calamitous flood, like the rains and the broiling summer sun, would pass. Everything would change, get better. Sacramento and San Francisco were still infinitely more full of opportunities than Boston. There was talk of establishing proper government, applying for statehood. He was going to see it through. He was not going to be beaten by anything as ordinary as bad luck. A quick trip back east to set up more credit, order new stocks, confer with Ez on what was happening, and he'd be back, stronger and surer than before.

A man was going past the window in a rowing boat. Theo leaned out and the man looked up.

"Hey, you!" Theo shouted. "I'll give you twenty dollars for that boat!"

Three months later, he went home.

After the raw red streets of Sacramento the neat, tree-lined thoroughfares of Boston seemed almost antique, quaint. The leisured pace of the crinolined ladies on the sloping streets of Beacon Hill, the stately passage of the elegant carriages with their beautifully groomed teams gave Theo the strange feeling of having been transported back in time. The streets of his home town seemed narrower than he remembered them, the houses set much more closely together.

There had been a party to welcome Theo home. The house had been full to overflowing with old friends. Everyone he knew seemed unchanged; they were all doing exactly what they had been doing before he left. Many seemed not to have noticed his absence. Those who had seemed inclined to treat his Californian adventures with a lofty, polite disinterest bordering on scorn, as if nothing which happened in so remote a place could possibly be of any importance. They all bet he was glad to be back in God's country.

They irritated Theo. They seemed like callow boys pretending a sophistication they did not possess. He found himself thinking, often, that this fellow or that would not last ten days in the diggings. They in turn were plainly nonplussed by the idea of anyone who had the advantages Theo Carver had simply throwing them over in exchange for a canvas-roofed store in far-off California. They ob-

viously thought him a bit unreliable, a bit wild, not the steady sort. It pleased Theo obscurely.

Mama and Pa were fascinated by his stories of the mines and the miners, and California was the topic of conversation every evening at dinner. When it wasn't California, it was railroads. Ezra had become a partner in a contracting company engaged in building a line from Chicago to Kansas City, a position to which he had been recommended by Pa's old friend Asa Whitney. In the course of building the line the firm had gone bankrupt. Ezra, as a partner, had been paid for his time and work in bonds from the abortive venture, and it turned out that they were the only worthwhile assets the company ever generated. The bonds were fully guaranteed by the counties through which the railroad passed, and Ezra received almost \$20,000 in payment for them. Using less than half of it, he had bought out the entire stock of the bankrupt railroad enterprise. He was now examining ways and means of raising capital to continue the line as far south as the Ohio border.

"I think you're mad," Theo said. "You could put the money to much better use in California. There's real need for railroads out there, not to mention our business."

"Tell me more," Ezra said. "How do people get about in your part of the world?"

"Muleback, mostly," Theo said. "Steamer or paddle-boat up the rivers until they're too shallow. Then on foot, or in canoes."

"What about revenue?" Ezra asked. "Are there enough people with cash to support a railroad?"

"Good point, good point," chimed in Hartwell Carver. "Back here we shall have immigrants coming into the country in bigger numbers every year. They will provide cheap labor to build railroads, and in time become its potential customers as well. Whereas in California, I hear the number going out there is falling."

"Pa's right, Theo," Ezra said. "From what the papers say it looks like the rush to California is over. People have heard about the cholera, the poor conditions. They're thinking more carefully before putting everything they own into a wagon and heading west."

"I think the papers are wrong. I think you're all wrong," Theo said. "If you'll forgive me, Pa. I think that next year will be bigger than ever in California. People come out there looking for gold, sure, and lots of them are disappointed, but they don't turn around and come back east. They see the land and they stay. The climate is good, the land is rich and fertile. The towns are growing. San Francisco is the wonder of the world, the speed it spreads. Every time I pass through it has changed completely. Why, even Sacramento has more than ten thousand people living in it now!"

"Was that B.C. or A.C.?" Ezra asked with a supercilious smile.

"What?"

"Before cholera or after cholera," Ezra said. "No, don't get on your high horse, Theo, I believe you! If you were in the real-estate business I'd have my doubts, but a dry old stick of a shopkeeper puffing his new home like that has to be sincere. Misguided, perhaps, but certainly sincere. I still think you're backing a loser. All this talk of lawlessness out there, vigilante committees and the like. People with families think about going west. And it's families one needs for success in the storekeeping business, not gold miners."

"I know, I know," Theo said. "I'm still saying things will improve next year. That's why I don't want you to put all your eggs into this railroad venture, Ez. I see a time when we could be employing factories to produce goods exclusively for us—our own line of pants, shirts, pickaxes, whatever. I can even envisage our having monopolies in certain lines."

"That sounds like wishful thinking, my boy," Hartwell Carver said, sniffing Ezra's cigar smoke with a disdainful expression. "I seem to recall your saying you'd be in profit within a year. Right or wrong?"

"Right," Theo said impatiently, "but how could I or anyone else have allowed for a series of events as unforeseen as those that happened? You've got to admit the chances of them recurring are remote, impossible."

"Nothing's impossible, my boy," Pa said sententiously. You wouldn't say that if you'd been to California, Theo

thought. There are plenty of things that are impossible, and plenty of men who've found it out the hard way. He said none of this, however.

"I still say I'm right," he said doggedly. "And even if I was wrong I'd take my licking and start in again. I reckon I've got the confidence of the local men, and I've some little say in the politics of the place. Whether Ezra's in with me or not, I plan to stay on and make a go of things."

Ezra drew leisurely on his cigar, and then exhaled the smoke with a noise like a steam whistle, clapping his hands slowly, ironically, like a barracker at an election. Theo flushed; there were times when Ezra's superciliousness got under his skin. He controlled himself; no point in arguing. If Ez didn't want to stay in the California business with him, he'd find someone who did.

"Let's get back to the subject of railroads," he said, recapturing his father's and Ezra's attention immediately, as he had intended. "I'd say there are enormous possibilities in California alone, not to mention the inevitability of the government's choosing Sacramento as the western terminus of any transcontinental line. Think of it this way: there's a constant influx of people wanting to be taken upcountry, and just as many men up there wanting to come down. I've talked with some of the better men in Sacramento, and they're as sure as I am that a California railroad would be a moneymaker. What's needed is someone with expert knowledge to study the problems."

"My thoughts exactly," Ezra said unexpectedly. "I've been turning it over in my mind for some time, and I think I know the very man to do it. He's a surveyor. Fine chap. Worked on the Ohio and Kansas. Judah Harvey."

"I think I know the name," Theo said, still off-balance from Ezra's volte-face. One minute he'd been calling California a bust. The next minute he was talking about building railroads out there.

"I'd imagine you have," Pa said. "He's a brilliant young man, fine engineer too. He designed the Niagara Gorge railroad. Incredible job. Connecticut man, isn't he, Ez?"

"Bridgeport," Ezra confirmed. "He's young, enthusias-

tic, and he knows railroads. He has more talent in his little finger than half the men running railroads today have in their entire heads."

"I'd like to meet him," Theo said. "He sounds interesting."

"He is and you will," Ezra said. "He's coming to dinner tomorrow."

Laura Carver's fine Waterford crystal glittered beneath the gleaming chandeliers. The long walnut William Savery table was covered with an exquisite Flanders lace tablecloth which Laura's grandmother had brought to Boston—then a thriving town of some sixteen thousand souls—in 1752. Theo smiled to see that Mama had produced the family's *pièce de résistance*, the silver cutlery designed by Paul Revere that had been their wedding present from the Wellesleys, Mama's parents. It looked as if no trouble was to be spared to impress the engineer Harvey, even if the ostensible reason for the dinner was to introduce him to Theo.

Throughout the meal Theo watched his younger brother, constantly surprised by the way that Ezra had matured during the time Theo had been in California. There had always been the streak of opportunism, even when they were at school, but Ezra's steel had an edge to it now. Perhaps it had been the lucky break with the railroad bonds, Theo thought, which had freed the rapacity and ruthlessness waiting to emerge. Ezra's mind had an agility and breadth to which Theo was unaccustomed, and which made him feel almost envious. He did not by any means consider himself dull or even slow-witted, but he knew instinctively that Ezra had that fractional extra, that faster reflex in the mind that he, Theo, would never be able to match.

He remembered that even at school it had always been Ez who shone. There had never seemed to be anything he could not do at once and well. If he read something, he remembered it effortlessly. Others slogged laboriously through Latin grammars and history books where Ezra sailed along, utterly relaxed. One year Theo had trained intensively for the annual Sports Day. In his chosen sport,

swimming, he broke a decade-old record. His glow of achievement was shortlived. The following year, without any apparent effort and certainly no training worth mentioning, Ezra reduced Theo's time by a full second, establishing a record which had not yet been bettered. Put him on a horse and he sat in the saddle as if he had been made part of the animal. Put him in a sailboat and he managed it effortlessly. Put him in a discussion and he dominated it at once. Let him enter a room and the other men in it seemed all at once less interesting. Girls became fluttery and coy when he was around. Mothers wanted him to be their sons' friend. Fathers clapped him on the back and invited his opinion of their wine purchases. Ezra took anyone on at their own level, and more often than not dazzled them. Or razzle-dazzled them, Theo thought, using the apt Western vernacular.

Harvey was another matter entirely. Small, intense and wiry, Judah Harvey was unquestionably a railroad fanatic, dedicated and enthusiastic. His blue eyes flashed as he spoke of the problems of building bridges, cuttings, rights of way. He was sanguine, but he was unquenchably ambitious. No wonder he and Ez were friends, Theo thought, wondering why the thought made him sour.

They had already spoken of California, but only in the most general terms, and not of railroads, except to hear some of Harvey's fascinating stories. There was a folklore of railroading, and he had told them some of it: of road kids and rail stiffs, hobo slang and train stories. Then the ladies rose to withdraw and Hartwell Carver went over to the sideboard to bring the port decanter to the table.

"Well now, Judah," Ezra said. "Let's talk about this California railroad. Theo here is convinced that California's the coming place, and with it, he says, the railroads will come as well."

"I had heard some talk about a railroad out there," Harvey said. His voice was mild, low-pitched. "Have you any idea where it might run, Mr. Carver?"

"From Sacramento to a place called Negro Bar," Theo said. "Folsom they're calling it now. About twenty-two miles."

"And you see this as a profitable investment, sir?"

"Let me put it another way," Theo said. "I see it as one kind of profitable investment."

"And do you know what, if anything, has been done by way of surveying the route?" Harvey asked.

"I have ridden along it. Carriages have traveled the whole route. One assumes that where carriages can go, a railroad may also."

"Ah," Harvey said, a world of patient understanding in his voice. He was very sure of himself, Theo thought. Another reason he got on with Ez, no doubt.

"There is plenty of grassland," Theo said. "The ground is good. Not too many hills. I—" He stopped at the sight of Harvey's upraised hand.

"It won't do, sir, it simply won't do," Harvey said. "The only worthwhile information you've given me is the distance between the two termini."

"I beg your pardon," Theo said.

"No, please don't be offended," Harvey hastened to say. "I mean no disrespect, sir. It's simply that you do not perhaps appreciate what is involved in the building of a railroad."

"Of that you may be sure," Theo said. "I never pretended otherwise."

"Keep your shirt on, Theo," Ezra said, lighting a cigar.

"Let me ask you this," Harvey said insistently. "Have you a profile of the land?"

"No."

"I would need that to make a judgment of alignments and grades. How many cubic yards of excavation and embankment do you foresee?"

"I have no idea."

"Are there any tunnels to be cut? Bridges to be built?"

"Possibly," Theo said, anger rising. The man was making a fool of him, and doing it on purpose.

"What sources are there for masonry? For timber?" Harvey went on relentlessly. For all the simulated mischief in his expression, Theo realized that Judah Harvey was enjoying showing him up. All right, Theo thought, if you want that kind of war you can have it.

"What is the cost estimate you have placed upon the venture, Mr. Carver?"

Before he could frame an answer Theo was startled to hear Ezra burst out laughing.

"Come, Judah, it's you who'll have to answer that question, not Theo. He hasn't said he wants to build a railroad, only that there's room for one to be built. Theo's not a railroader, are you, Theo?"

"Just a storekeeper," Theo said.

"There!" Ezra said. "See?"

"But a storekeeper," Theo added gently, "who would have to foot all the bills for any such venture."

"No, Theo, I'd share all that," Ezra protested, but he knew why Theo had said it, and there was a small silence as Judah Harvey's eyes met Theo's and then dropped. The engineer's face was flushed; he realized his tactical error and made haste to repair it.

"You're quite right, of course, Mr. Carver," he said. "But mark my words, money will mean precious little if you have it in mind to wait. Railroads are the thing, sir. Their time has come."

"Why, did you know that only the other month Congress granted two and three-quarter million acres of land to the Illinois Central to build a line from Galena to Cairo?" Hartwell Carver said. "They're finally doing what Whitney and I suggested in the 'thirties!"

"Whitney?" Harvey said. "The Japanese trader?"

"The same," Hartwell Carver said, leaning back in his chair with the smile of a man who has finally got the conversation around to where he wants it. Ezra looked at Theo and raised his eyes towards the ceiling, an old boyhood signal both understood to mean: "Here we go again!"

"My dear Harvey," Dr. Carver said gently, as if forgiving the engineer some inadvertent *faux pas*. "Daniel Webster was arguing for a transcontinental railroad in Congress more than twenty years ago, eighteen thirty or thirty-one, I can't recall. The following year I wrote my series of articles for the *New York Courier and Engineer*. This railroad talk ain't new, sir, not by a long chalk!"

"Pa suggested the federal government reserve eighteen million acres of land for a railroad running from Chicago to the Oregon Territory," Ezra explained. "He said . . . what was it you said, Pa?"

"I said I could see a day quite clearly when transcontinental trains with cars a hundred feet long holding sleeping berths and dining-rooms would be crossing the country regularly."

"I can imagine that you were thought somewhat visionary, sir," Harvey remarked with a smile. "In the eighteen-thirties, I believe the longest railroad in the world was the one running from Charleston to Hamburg in South Carolina, a distance of one hundred and thirty-six miles."

"Tush, no imagination, that's the trouble with politicians," Hartwell Carver snorted. "Took Whitney to get people interested. Took a parcel of money, too. Mostly Whitney's," he added with an unrepentant grin.

He told Harvey the story of how Whitney had stumped the country whipping up political support for the idea of a transcontinental railroad. Whitney had proposed that Congress sell him seventy-eight million acres of land for sixteen cents an acre. On this land he would build a railroad financed by selling the land to settlers who would move into the country in the wake of the advancing lines.

"A hundred and twenty-five million dollars," Harvey murmured. "If he had that much money, why didn't he build the railroad anyway?"

"He didn't," Dr. Carver said. "So he spent the next five years getting the accord of seventeen states and territories for a line running from Chicago through the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains to Oregon."

"And then?" Harvey asked.

"And then Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri," Ezra said.

"That blackguard!" Hartwell Carver said. "Self-serving mountebank! He had St. Louis in mind for the eastern terminus, favoring his own bailiwick, naturally. Dismissed Chicago with all its natural advantages. Got his parasitic cronies together and succeeded in getting Congress to table Whitney's plan. Can you believe that a man would stoop to such tactics?"

"Come now, doctor," Harvey said. "Whitney was a dreamer. You must have seen that."

"A dreamer, sir, certainly. But a practical one. And

honest, in a world not noted for its supply of honest men."

"Yes, Pa, but he'd done no surveys," Ezra said. "He had no real conception of the physical difficulties of building a railroad, especially through the Sierras."

"Your son is right, Dr. Carver," Harvey said. "Tunneling, bridging, excavating—there are the stern realities of building a railroad, not the rhetoric of politicians or financiers, however high-minded."

"Well, as to that, I'm not in a position to judge," Hartwell Carver said, conceding the point reluctantly. "Whitney struck me as being right for the time, maybe even ahead of it. He certainly stimulated enormous interest in the idea of a railroad across the country."

"He certainly did, sir," Harvey said. "But his plan was unrealistic, as you must know. He even took it to the British, proposing that they build across Canada. They turned him down as well. Although I see you are no admirer of Senator Benton—"

"Admirer, sir? Admirer?" Dr. Carver said, huffing. "The devil you say."

"Yet he was right to insist on surveys before decision. Where he was wrong was in sending his son-in-law to make them."

"You don't think highly of Frémont?" Theo said. He was a little surprised to hear someone of Frémont's stature questioned by someone of Harvey's. The little engineer had done some fine things, but he could hardly consider himself in Frémont's league.

"Frémont was a great pathfinder," Harvey said. "But he was stubborn. He ignored the traditional routes west, for all that they had been the result of endless trial and error. He insisted on remaining as close as possible to the thirty-eight parallel, which had to be impracticable. Even then, he might have made a most significant discovery—of which, more in a moment, gentlemen—had he not tried to cross the mountains in the dead of winter in order to prove old Benton's theory."

Frémont's expedition had been trapped 12,000 feet up in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico. Ten of his men had frozen to death, and only chance, in the

shape of a wandering tribe of friendly Ute Indians who rescued them, had saved the Pathfinder's face and reputation. He had returned from the West insisting that the route was feasible but, as Harvey pointed out, without any data of use to an engineer.

"Now to the significant matter, gentlemen," he said conspiratorially. From beneath his chair he produced a roll of parchment and gestured for Ezra and Theo to make space upon the table, where he unrolled it. It was a map of the United States, hand drawn and impeccably shaded with watercolors.

"My own work," Harvey told them. "I prefer my own maps. Now, gentlemen, here is my point. Interest, as you know, presently centers—and rightly—upon a direct east-west railroad, its eastern terminus somewhere between Chicago and St. Louis, its route effectively that taken by the wagon trains. Its western terminus can only be Sacramento—perhaps San Francisco at some later date. There will be incredible competition to build this line, gentlemen. Whoever does build it will become one of the most powerful groups in the United States. Its completion will signal the commencement of the railroad age, for the transcontinental route will be but the beginning. Railroads will make every other form of transportation obsolete!"

"You think we should interest ourselves in competing for the right to build the east-west line?" Ezra asked.

"No, I do not," Harvey said, smiling. "I think there's another possibility, one that could produce an enterprise infinitely more lucrative than the direct east-west route. I am talking, gentlemen, about the south-western line."

"The south-west?" Theo said. "Through the desert, you mean?"

"Folly!" snapped Hartwell Carver, leaning back in his chair. "The Indians of the south-west are among the most combative on the continent, sir! The army cannot even contain them, much less subdue them."

"It will, doctor," Harvey said confidently. "When the tide of immigration which is presently washing upon our shores spills out across the country, a great deal of it will move west. That is inevitable. And then it will move to the south and west, where the lands are warmer. That,

too, is inevitable, and so therefore is the railroad through that country."

"I've been listening to railroad talk for more than twenty years," Dr. Carver said. "I've never even heard such a route mentioned, much less actively discussed."

"Yes," Ezra said. "What would its route be?"

"From Chicago to Kansas," Harvey said. "Along the Santa Fé Trail—think for a moment of how Santa Fé has grown on the trade of that traffic alone! Then down the valley of the Rio Grande to El Paso del Norte, the lowest all-weather pass in the Rocky Mountains. Across Arizona and over the Sierras into California."

"You make it sound very easy, Harvey," Ezra said.

"Much of it would be," Harvey said. "A great deal of the right of way is across flat land. Kansas, the Rio Grande valley, most of Arizona, and the deserts of California. But it's not only that. Such a line would also open the fertile lands of Colorado and New Mexico, establish a trade route between America and Mexico which at present does not even exist. There is mineral wealth and agricultural wealth in every acre of that land, gentlemen, and no one has ever given it a thought!"

They sat staring at Judah Harvey's map, trying to envision it, but the vision was too enormous to conjure up. Listening to Harvey it was not impossible to believe, to hope, that it could in fact be done. He sounded so confident, so sure of himself. His eloquence and enthusiasm swept the imagination over all barriers, and at last Theo realized why Ezra had brought him to the house. It was always the same, always had been. Ez was the one who found the exciting new games to play, the brilliant children with whom to play them. Theo had gone along with him all his life, given as much choice as the tail on a comet. Alone, he would carefully plot his course, charting the reefs and marking the shoals, ensuring the good condition of the ship. Ezra was the one to jump into the nearest canoe, shouting for Theo to follow as he paddled like fury to a destination even he did not properly know. Theo wondered how Ezra would hold out if he ever got into a long haul.

Later, when the little engineer had said his good nights

and left, Ezra and Theo went into the library for a brandy before retiring. Ezra stood by the sideboard with the decanter in his hand, grinning like a schoolboy who has foxed the Head into cancelling a punishment he knew he deserved.

"Persuasive, isn't he?" he grinned, pouring generous measures of cognac into the Waterford glasses. "D'you like him?"

"He has a great deal of drive and enthusiasm," Theo hedged.

"Oh come on, Theo," Ezra said. "Do you *like* him?"

"Not much," Theo admitted.

"Me neither," Ezra laughed, clapping him on the shoulder. "Too eager by half, our little engineer. But he could be very useful to us, Theo, very useful indeed. He knows all there is to know about the railroad business. And everybody in it, which is even more important. What did you think of his idea for a south-western route?"

"It flies in the face of all accepted opinion," Theo said, "but . . . it does sound feasible."

"Plausible, you mean," Ezra snorted. "He hasn't much time for your friend Frémont, has he?"

"No," Theo said. "That surprised me."

"Surprised me, too," Ezra said. "You know our Judah has never been west of the Mississippi?"

"What?" Theo was astonished. "But—he spoke with such authority!"

"Yes, didn't he?" Ezra smiled. "He has that. Believe me, Theo, every rock that God ever created was put there as a personal challenge to Judah Cromwell Harvey. He could build that line. He's a great engineer. And when the day of the railroads comes—which I do not believe is yet—he'll be the man to make the difference between success and failure. When that day comes I want him with us!" He downed the rest of his brandy and went across to pour another. "Now," he said, coming back to the table. "Let's get down to our other business."

Theo sailed back to California more optimistic than he had been at any time in his life. He and Ezra had come to several important decisions during his stay in Boston, their aim in every case the same: to eliminate any and all middlemen and to take charge of their own destiny. The first task facing Theo on his return was to move his base of operations to San Francisco, cost notwithstanding.

"Keep the Sacramento business going by all means," Ezra advised. "Hire a man to run it, or get someone in on a partnership basis. But Theo, you've got to move into San Francisco now."

"The politics are going to be run from Sacramento," Theo pointed out.

"I doubt it," Ezra said. "The decisions are always made where the money is, Theo, and for now at least the money is in San Francisco. And that's where we want to be; where the money is."

He said a lot of other things that made sense and, as before, Theo was impressed by his brother's grasp of essentials, his confidence and command. Ezra said he intended to do a great deal more than just run a store in partnership with Theo. If Theo was right and the settlers were going to come in their hundreds of thousands, then what they ought to do was to lay in the right stocks—farming implements, blasting powder, harness, axes, shovels, ploughs. If they could consolidate their business properly, they could deal direct with manufacturers in-

stead of the brokers and wholesalers. Theo's narrower margins would enable him to outsell his competitors, driving them to compete at a loss or throw in the towel.

"Aim for monopoly, aim for dominance," Ezra said. "That's the way to get to the top."

That night he unrolled a map of Central America in front of Theo and tapped it with an unlit cigar.

"Look at this," he said. "Here's the present route to California. Steamer to Chagres. Across the isthmus to Panama City, then another steamer to California. Delays all the way. Goods spoiling in the heat, profits lost because the market has altered before we can get the goods to it. We have to change that."

"Oh yes, of course," Theo said sarcastically. "Maybe we should buy our own shipping line."

"Exactly!" Ezra said, slapping the table with the flat of his hand. He relished the look of astonishment on his brother's face for a moment before continuing. "Look, Theo, we can gain control of the California route, break the Panama stranglehold!"

"You're crazy!" Theo said. "How would we do that?"

"Nicaragua," Ezra said.

"What?"

"Nicaragua," Ezra repeated, stabbing the map with his forefinger to indicate where the country was. "You see there's a huge lake in the middle, and a river flowing down to the coast at San Juan del Norte. If you could get a steamer up that river and across that lake, they'd be within eleven miles of the Pacific. It would cut five hundred miles off the present journey, and a week off the time. And we could own it!"

"Using what for money?"

"A loan, my dear fellow. We form a company, offer shares in our new transportation system, and with the funds we build the ships to carry passengers and freight to San Juan and then up the river."

"Wait just a moment," Theo said. "How do you propose to ship across country from the lake? That last eleven miles?"

"Simple," Ezra said. "We build a canal."

"What? You're not serious!"

"Oh yes I am."

"Then you're off your head!" Theo said. "Have you any idea of the problems involved?"

"Political, geographical, physiological and financial," Ezra said urbanely. "Yes."

"You *are* serious."

"Watch me. In eighteen months I'll cut the feet from under the Panama route. In five years I'll have the price of a journey to California down to a hundred dollars."

"One fifth of the present price?" Theo said. "It can't be done!"

"You'll see!" Ezra said.

"And what about the transcontinental railroad?"

"It will come. But not soon enough to affect my plans."

"Ez, either you're the biggest sharper that ever walked, or you know more than you're telling me. Where are you going to find assets enough to get people to invest in this pipe-dream of yours? You'll have to have some ships, something to show you can get people down to this Nicaragua place."

"We'll have ships," Ezra said confidently.

"We will? How?"

"Judah Harvey introduced me to a fellow named Cooley, Randolph Cooley. Big shipping broker. Has offices in the Tontine building on Wall Street in New York."

"I know the name," Theo said "His agents in California are de Witt and Kittle."

"That's the fellow," Ezra said. "He told me to keep an eye on a line called Merchants Express. Unbeknown to anyone I started to pick up the stocks as they came on to the market. The Line was strapped for money when trade fell off this last winter, so it wasn't difficult."

"Where did you get capital to buy stocks?"

"I borrowed it against my railroad stocks," Ezra said with a grin.

"But . . . they're worthless," Theo said.

"Worthless? Ah, you mean *you* wouldn't buy them, knowing what you know?"

"Precisely."

"The thing is, Theo, the people who loaned me that

money don't know what you know, and I've no intention of telling them."

"And now?"

Ezra explained again: you used the shares as collateral to raise money. With the money you then bought, or built, assets. Then you could borrow more money against those assets with which to pay back the original loans, and any extra—or get further loans if there was no extra—to expand the company. The idea, he said, was simple: establish a transportation system which would guarantee connections on the Pacific side of the isthmus, undercut the fare structure of the existing companies, use the fares (paid in advance) to purchase goods for sale in California, and confound competition there by shipping those goods faster and cheaper than anyone else. Drive the opposition to the wall, buy it up cheap, use its assets as collateral for more loans, and so on and so on *ad infinitum*.

"Who owns the Merchants Express line?"

"A man named Terrill," Ezra said. "Of the Virginia Terrills."

"Is he a slaver?"

"No, he's not. All his people are freed men."

"Will he sell his shares?"

"Perhaps," Ezra said enigmatically. "If I can't persuade him some other way. There are several areas of—what shall we say?—mutual interest."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you when I come to California," Ezra said.

"When are you planning to do that?" Theo said.

"In a few years' time," Ezra grinned. "And when I get there, Theo, I expect the Carver business to be as big as anything in California."

"That won't be easy," Theo said.

"Nobody said it would," Ezra Carver replied.

Ezra Carver had very few friends. Even late in his life those few friends that he did have—had they been the kind of men to sit down and think about such things—would have readily agreed that they admired rather than liked Ezra. They were men who admired wealth and power rather than personal qualities. They liked a man

who was a pusher, a doer, a man to watch. Ezra Carver was all of those things, they said, and a few other things considerably less polite. Very few people ever came right out and said they liked him. If he cared, Ezra Carver gave no indication of it. He was not trying to be lovable.

He had no time for the fraternities, the clubs, the vacuous talk of wine and horses in which most of his former schoolmates now indulged. But since they were all brokers, merchants, businessmen of one kind or another, he used his acquaintance ruthlessly. He had a goal and he wanted to reach it. He had no intention of being Theo's factotum for ever, dollar shaving in Boston and New York to make a few extra cents' profits in San Francisco. According to Ezra's reasoning a man spent exactly the same amount of time becoming a millionaire as he did becoming a chief clerk in a shipping office. Once he got the payment for the railroad bonds, he knew he could have bought himself a secure spot on the Exchange or a plush berth in insurance, but he was simply not the type. He set out with what was to become characteristic energy to establish a new road and sea link to California. The fact that his funds were paltry and his experience nil daunted him no more than the fact that to achieve his ends he would have to drive the existing Panama consortiums out of business. "Mustard on my ham, no more," he said many years later.

Ezra's first step had been to establish Carver Shipping. The fact that he actually owned no ships was as irrelevant to him as was the fact that he had neither the men nor the materials with which to build the great canal described in his prospectus. Running from Lake Nicaragua to the sea, the brochure said, the canal would link the Caribbean and the Pacific by means of steamers which would ply up and down the river running eastwards from the lake. Ezra spent more than a thousand dollars on the prospectus: only the finest parchment, the most impeccable typography and layouts, the most expensive printers, would do. Ezra knew nothing about building canals, but he instinctively knew a great deal about human nature. The prospectus looked as if it had been prepared by someone with unlimited finance and know-how. It impressed everyone who

received it, and especially when they learned from Ezra that he was "in negotiation" with the Paris merchant bank of d'Arblay Frères for a ten-million-dollar loan with which to complete the eleven miles of canal.

Ezra did not for one second expect to raise the loan. What mattered was that he could truthfully swear to the fact that he was engaged in negotiations with d'Arblays. Impressed by these "negotiations" the New York brokers pushed his stocks, and Ezra soon had enough capital to proceed with the next phase of his plan. It was all so damned easy that he was astonished.

Now he invested in three ships. He paid Cunard ten percent of the asking price, with the balance to fall due within nine months of signature. He figured that if he wasn't making money in that time he never would; whereupon he could sell the ships, pay off Cunard, and maybe even show a small profit. The ships themselves were old, veterans of the transatlantic service; but they were sound and seaworthy and, by any standards pertaining to the California run, positively luxurious in their fittings and accommodation. Ezra hired skeleton crews and sailed them down to the Caribbean, anchoring off San Juan del Norte. He knew word of his presence would precede him to the capital, Managua. This, too, was part of his plan.

He travelled overland to Managua, where he paid a local lawyer a considerably inflated retainer to arrange meetings for him with the best men in the government. Between whiles, he reigned expansively over the bar of the city's biggest hotel, buying everyone drinks. As he expected, they called him *El Yanqui Rico*, the rich American. He got his appointments with the Nicaraguan ministers with gratifying alacrity.

He told them that he wanted a concession to build a route to the gold fields across Nicaragua, and described in glowing terms the benefits that such a route would bring to the country. Visions of their shares of taxes and levys and trade danced in their dark eyes like flame, and Ezra played them like trout. He said later they were a bunch of greasy-haired dagoes with whom one could no more have made a binding agreement than one could nail a jelly to a wall, but in Managua he smiled and smiled and made

his deals. It cost him more than ten thousand dollars to get what he wanted, plus a promise to pay twenty per cent of all the profits from the canal company to the government of Nicaragua. Ezra would as cheerfully have surrendered half of the profits had they asked for them, since there were to be none; but he drove a hard bargain nonetheless. It was not in his nature to do otherwise.

He came back to San Juan with the agreement signed and ratified by the Nicaraguan Senate, as bearded as a brigand and light-headed from near-starvation brought on by his steadfast refusal to touch any of the local foods or drink anything other than the Malvern water that he had brought down from New York aboard the *Sidon*.

He returned to New York, where the announcement of his agreement with the Nicaraguan government created a great stir on the Exchange. Shares in Carver Shipping were bid higher and higher by the prospect of its controlling a new route to the gold fields, and Ezra watched their progress, waiting, waiting, waiting. At what he judged perfectly to be the right moment, he sold off every share he possessed, unloading them in blocks big enough to make the process speedy but not so big as to draw attention to what he was doing. They were snapped up by the bulls in the market as soon as they appeared. Ezra suddenly became a wonder boy, twenty-five years of age and already well on the way to his first million, as they said. Ezra smiled at their compliments, accepted their backslaps and drinks. They did not know how right they were, but they soon would.

As soon as he had unloaded his stocks Ezra saw to it that word reached the Exchange that d'Arblay Frères in Paris had refused to advance the ten million dollars he needed to build the Nicaraguan canal. The market reacted entirely predictably, and in a matter of days the stocks were selling at below par. As soon as they had settled down, Ezra began buying again, as carefully as he had sold. Within a few months he had purchased back all his own stocks and more besides. Not only did he now control the company and all its assets—most of which he had bought with investors' money—but he also cleared a net profit of half a million dollars.

Ezra was back in business—the business of making the trans-Nicaragua route work. He still had his agreement with the Nicaraguans, and he soothed their impatience with a liberal greasing of palms.

"I'm going to chart this route and I'm going to make it work," he wrote Theo in California. "If I can do it, we'll have a freighting monopoly that will make it possible for you to get your goods cheaper than anyone else in that part of the world. And to make it all the sweeter, the passengers the line carries will be paying to make it run!"

Before he set out for Nicaragua he went up the river to Albany to talk to the riverboat men. He needed a top skipper, he told them, a tough-minded, determined and, if necessary, reckless man who could take boats where no other man could go.

"I want a man ready to sail straight into the jaws of hell," he said.

"Aye," they said. "That bein' the case, the man you want is Jack Summerville. No other man on the river fits your specification."

Jack Summerville, they told him, would sail a boat where nobody dared to go, and keep her going until her bottom was ripped out. Then he'd get into the water and carry the damned ship on his back.

"That sounds like the man I'm looking for," Ezra said. "Can you tell me where I'd be likely to find him?"

They gave him the name of a Dutch tavern in New Brunswick, and Ezra found Summerville there; he hired him within the hour. Summerville was a Dutchman, born and raised on Staten Island where the Moravians had settled almost a century earlier. The original name of the family had been Somerwil; they were from Amstelveen, outside Amsterdam, in Holland. Summerville was short, bearded, stocky and profane. He'd learned sailing on his father's periauger in New York harbor, ferrying passengers or loads of vegetables to market in Manhattan. At seventeen he'd borrowed enough from his parents to buy his own boat, and at the end of his first year paid it back with a hundred percent interest, keeping a further eight hundred dollars profit for himself. Staten Island to White-

hall Steps, the Harlem River, the Hudson, the Raritan and the Delaware, every channel of the maze of water around New York was an open book to Jack Summerville. He had piloted privateers for the gamblers who sailed outside the Narrows during the war of 1812, and cargo clippers to Virginia. He had seen Fulton's paddleboat *Clermont* clank up the Hudson at two knots in 1810 and put his money on steam being the future.

"I don't keer all that much about makin' money, Mr. Carver," Summerville said. "I kin allus come out ahead. But takin' a boat further an' faster 'an anyon's ivver done afore, that sets my blood abile!"

"Well, Mr. Summerville," Ezra said. "I've got a river they say can't be sailed on. How would you like to take a crack at her?"

"You show me the river, sonny," Summerville replied. "Then we'll see what we sees."

They went up the river in a dugout canoe paddled by a couple of natives who obviously thought them crazy men. Jack Summerville frequently told them to pull the boat into the bank, and then he jumped into the rushing waters, wading out until the frothing current threatened to sweep him away. He had a twelve-foot pole that he used to gauge depths and widths between rocks, channels, chutes. When the rapids were especially strong he tied a rope around his chest beneath the arms and they held on to him like weird anglers trying to land some even more bizarre fish.

"Damme, but you've sure picked a bastard!" Summerville panted more than once as they pulled him aboard. "A real bastard!" But his eyes were aglow with battle, and when they finally returned to the huddle of huts at the mouth of the river he stuck out a calloused hand and told Ezra it could be done.

"I'll take your boats up there, Mr. Carver," he said. "Whenever you're ready to start!"

"And the rocks?" Ezra asked. "The rapids?"

"Hell and damnation!" Summerville roared, making the natives nearby cringe with fear, their eyes rolling in terror. "If they's rocks in the way, I'll make the goddam boat jump over them!"

Ezra went back to New York and made the down payment on a steamer which he renamed *Forager*. Jack Summerville sailed her down to San Juan and picked up the first batch of passengers already ferried there in the old Cunarders, anxiously awaiting their transportation across the isthmus to the Pacific. Meanwhile, Ezra arranged through Theo to charter a ship out of San Francisco down to the western seaboard of Nicaragua. He just hoped that somehow the boat would arrive to pick up the California-bound passengers at roughly the right time. There was no guarantee that it would; but then, Ezra thought, there was no guarantee that Summerville would even get the *Forager* up the river.

Summerville did it. He plumbed the channels where he could, and blasted them deeper where he couldn't. He warped the *Forager* upstream by tying cables to trees along the river bank and unloading the passengers, whom he ordered to haul her along by sheer physical force. When they protested, he told them they'd better do what he said or they'd rot in the Nicaraguan jungle. They pulled. Summerville tied down the safety valve on the boiler until the ship was on the point of exploding with the sheer energy bottled up inside her—but he took her upriver, all the way to San Carlos. There, on the shore of Lake Nicaragua, stagecoaches that Ezra had bought through intermediaries in Managua waited, smartly painted in Carver Shipping liveries—red, white and blue. These ferried the passengers through the Cordillera de Guanacaste along roads only slightly less awful than the river run, and on down to La Cruz. There they were unceremoniously dumped to wait for the boat from San Francisco.

Some of the early runs were unadulterated hell, but within a year Ezra's service was not only established, it was actually making money. He was expediting goods to Theo at prices no other carrier could touch. As for the overcrowding, the poor food, the accidents—and there were always accidents with the roughneck skippers that Jack Summerville had hired to handle his ships on the Rio San Juan—well, men with the gold fever didn't expect to be mollycoddled.

The weak link in the chain was the last leg of the journey. It was costing far too much money to charter boats in San Francisco, and even more to get anyone to man them. Via a broker in New York, Ezra gradually began acquiring more stock in Merchants Express while at the same time, with his usual characteristic thoroughness, he began finding out everything he could about John Terrill of Richmond, Virginia.

There had been Terrills in Virginia before the *Mayflower* was even built, let alone rented by the Pilgrims. John Terrill was primarily a landowner and tobacco grower, but the family's holdings included shipping interests, cotton mills, and factories—all of which did not escape Ezra's interested attention. Born in 1798, Terrill had married Claudette Bonnetain, the daughter of French aristocrats who had fled the slave insurrection in Santo Domingo in 1794 and settled in Norfolk, Virginia, rather than join the majority of their kind who found refuge in the old quarter of New Orleans. From their marriage had come three children, John, James and Jane. The Terrill plantation, Fairacres, lay along the James River not far from Richmond town. Most of the great Virginia houses were in that area, along the tidewater rivers—the James, the York, the Rappahannock, and the valley of the Shenandoah. They were all reached the same way, along winding red-dirt roads that branched off the main highways like the tentacles of an octopus, reaching out to the homes of the Virginia "cousinhood" of Lees and Carters and Pages and Cabells and Randolphs and Terrills.

Those families lived in a different world from that of men like Ezra Carver. In a world of independent men, John Terrill was the trait personified: he maintained a way of life suited only and entirely to himself. He rose late every morning, for he had always said that the time a man got out of bed was nothing like so important as what he

did once he had done so. Everyone at Fairacres knew when Papa John was up. He never went in to breakfast until he had seen his three children, for whom he would dance the Fisher's Hornpipe, or play upon an imaginary fiddle, or pull faces and tickle them until they squealed with delight. Sometimes he would roar at them like a big, bad giant and tell them stories that would make their little eyes go round in wonder. Then he would walk, in his brittle, martinet's march, to the dining-room to eat a lusty, if unceremonious, breakfast. He was, he always claimed, a man who did not care too much for fuss and frills and furbelows, but one ceremony in his life remained unchanging, unchangeable, and that was dinner. Dinner, Papa John maintained, was the most important meal of the day and it behoved a man to see to the pleasure and comfort of his family and his friends, guests and visitors at the dinner table. Everyone staying at the house, family or otherwise, was bidden to be in the hall five minutes before the last bell was rung. Sherry would be served, or cordial for the ladies if they wished. Precisely at seven-thirty, Papa John would personally hand in a lady guest to dinner. Gentlemen guests were expected to follow suit once Papa John had led the way.

The family never enjoyed dinner half as much when Papa John was away on business, or visiting his far-flung family of cousins, aunts, brothers, sisters. He spent part of each summer with his mother in Charleston, and went once or twice a year to New York or to Washington, both of which he detested. Each fall he spent two weeks hunting deer, and there were also frequent business trips to Jackson, Vicksburg and New Orleans. He did much of his travelling by boat, always insisting upon having the state-room immediately above the boiler.

"If the ding boat's agointa blow up," he would say, "I'd as soon go all at once as risk bein' half exploded, isn't it?" Papa John ended most of his sentences with that rhetorical phrase.

January always found him in New Orleans, where he was a member of the Boston Club. He sometimes visited Greenbrier White Sulphur Springs ("Got to do somethin' for the liver once in a while, isn't it?") where his cottage

was said to have been the scene of some memorable games of whist. He was an admirer of Henry Clay, whose career he followed with the deepest interest. John Terrill saw himself as a gentleman farmer who, like his hero, "would rather be right than be President." He kept no slaves at Fairacres, but hired freed men to work the land. He made his rounds in a pony-drawn cart, an umbrella shading him from the sun. He rode, he hunted, he bred horses and raced them. His conversation was of law and of agriculture, the state of the county or the state itself. He admired S. S. Prentiss and believed *The National Intelligencer* to be the best-conducted newspaper in the United States. He kept it on file at Fairacres and referred to it whenever he wrote letters for publication in the Press, which he did frequently.

Tutors had had the care of his sons until they were old enough to send to college. His daughter Jane had a governess, who was treated by everyone at Fairacres as if she were a member of the master's family. "No one but a lady should have the charge of my gel," Papa John said. "And like a lady I'll have her treated. Isn't it?"

They said that Terrill was often cheated and imposed upon because he was a liberal and generous man. Several of his foremen had left his employ with the wherewithal to become landowners themselves. Papa John wished them well and helped them where he could. As for those who had cheated him, he said it was well worth whatever it had cost him to find the scoundrels out. He was old fashioned, a gentleman in one word and in two. All this and more Ezra knew before he ever left New York for Richmond. Even so, what he discovered when he reached the South beggared all the descriptions he had been given.

God knew the roads outside northern cities were bad enough. In the South they were appalling. A heavy shower turned them into quagmires through which the coaches labored hub-deep to reach taverns no better than Siberian alehouses. Ezra slept—with one eye open, since the place seemed exclusively inhabited by ruffians who swigged down whisky with their mouths full of pork and hoecake—in a bare, bleak room furnished with a bed whose mattress was stuffed with wood shavings. Two other travellers

shared such luxury as that was; the snores of the men in adjoining rooms added to theirs made it almost impossible to sleep anyway.

Yet somehow in this wilderness, as though by bush telegraph, the word went ahead that Ezra was *en route* to visit the Terrills of Fairacres. At a tavern in a place called Seven Pines, not much more than a log hut with hogs rooting around its doorway and an earthen jug hanging from a pole to proclaim its function, there was a young negro boy in mud-spattered livery stationed at the door. He had a tray of fruit and a stone jug of cider.

"Lookin' fo' Mist' Cahvoo!" he called in a thin, nervous voice. "I'se lookin' fo' Mist' Cahvoo."

It took Ezra a good twenty seconds to realize that the boy was speaking his name. When he introduced himself, the boy asked him to wait at the tavern, handed him the tray and ran off. Shortly afterwards a carriage drawn by two beautifully matched bay mares appeared. The driver was a big negro with a round, smiling face. He told Ezra that he was from Fairacres and that his name was Benjamin Agamemnon. He loaded Ezra's bags and helped his passenger aboard, then whipped the horses into a fast trot which took them along at a pace that raised a veil of red dust from the drying track behind them.

Fairacres lay on a gentle slope about half a mile above the river, a big house with white pillars, its doorway guarded by two stone lions frozen in the act of roaring. John Terrill was a handsome, tall man of about fifty, spare of frame, his most striking feature enormously bushy eyebrows. From below them bright, inquisitive eyes surveyed his world with benevolent amusement. He showed Ezra around the house. It was crammed with furniture, the walls cluttered with pictures both good and bad. There were musical instruments everywhere: pianos, harpsichords, guitars, flutes.

"You must see my library, Mr. Carver," Terrill said. "I take some pride in my collection."

He ushered Ezra into a bright, tall-windowed room that looked out across sloping lawns to a limpid lake on which swans floated. Shakespeare, Ezra noted, Montaigne, Cer-

vantes, Sterne, Pope, Addison, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe.

"You read a great deal, sir," he observed.

"Aha," said Terrill. "It isn't all playing the wag, sir. Some of life is earnest, some of life is real, isn't it?"

He didn't wait for an answer, and Ezra warmed to the older man as they potted about the place. He was shown everything: the kitchens, the out-kitchens, the smokehouses and stables, the hothouse, the gardens, the dyeing room, the fowl yard, the kennels, the dairy, the orchard. The whole estate was laid out well, lovingly and carefully maintained, the gardens formally informal, with terraces and arbours and box hedges and parterres. It was an enormously attractive place, and Ezra said as much to his host.

"It's that, sir, it's that," Terrill said. "I'm of a mind to hope it always will be, isn't it?"

"You ship cotton and tobacco directly from here?"

"There's a little wharf. I'll show it to you later," Terrill said. "You'll be stayin' awhile, of course."

"A day or two, sir, if I may," Ezra said. "I'd like to discuss some business with you. About your shipping stocks—"

"Not now, boy, not at all now," Terrill said, holding up a hand in mock horror. "We'll get to that, given time, isn't it?"

"As you wish, sir," Ezra said.

"First, y'all enjoy y'self," Terrill said. "You must have had a hard journey."

"There's not much pleasure in it," Ezra admitted.

"See?" Terrill said, as if Ezra had confirmed every single thing he, John Terrill, had ever said in his entire life. "Well, sir. We'll expect you for dinner. Not a minute later than twenty-five past seven. It's my only rule, isn't it?"

"It is," Ezra said automatically, but John Terrill was already bustling away. Ezra shook his head and made his way across the lawns to the house. A negro standing at the door offered him a glass of punch from the bowl standing on its block of dripping ice in the hall. The

sound of male voices came from the billiard room, but Ezra decided against joining whoever was in there. He went outside again, walking without plan or destination. The soft, sultry Southern air, warm and humid, made him feel ill at ease. The pace of life there, people's attitudes, were all so different from anything he had ever encountered before. He was in a hurry in an environment where hurry was anathema, almost an insult. He was a man who wished to quickly complete a business deal in a society which placed no real value upon success in business. Boys there were taught to study adequately and hunt well, the skills of arts and arms. Their code was never to betray the secrets of a friend, and to be courteous, truthful and brave. Ezra imagined that introspection would be as distasteful to them as business seemed to be. It was hard to adapt to their pace; it would be harder still to remain there until John Terrill was inclined or ready to speak of the matter which had brought Ezra Carver to see him.

Then he saw her.

Dressed in a lacy white crinoline, her face shaded by a broad-brimmed straw hat and a parasol, the girl was walking along the bank of the lake below the lawns. He changed his pace, turning towards her for no reason he was able to identify then or later. Her face was oval, pale and lovely, with huge, dark eyes that contained the faintest hint of . . . amusement? She nodded and smiled as Ezra took off his hat.

"Ezra Carver, ma'am," he said. "At your service. I just—"

"Got here, I know," she said. Her voice was soft and low-pitched, and her smile was one of the wonders of the world. "I am Jane Terrill."

"May I walk with you?" he said.

"I think that would be very nice," she said.

They talked as they wandered slowly around the estate, and Ezra learned that she was some four years younger than he, and not the least bit impressed by either his seniority or the worldly air he at first professed. Once he abandoned pretence she grew more friendly, and Ezra found himself simultaneously amused and delighted by the fact.

Her eyes—they were green, he noted now, and not brown as he had first thought—were cool and alert.

"Don't you find life here uneventful?" he asked as they skirted the lake for the second or third time. The white pillars of the house were shimmeringly reflected on the unruffled surface of the water. Swans came gliding, seeking tidbits.

"Uneventful?" Jane Terrill said with a little laugh. "Lordy, no! It's never that! Why, there are times when we have forty or fifty people stayin' here, Mr. Carver. We ride, we go huntin', we visit our folks. Seems like more often than not there aren't enough hours in the day. It's anythin' but uneventful."

"And you, Miss Terrill—how do you spend your days?"

"Well," she said, smiling in the manner of someone who knows something the other person does not. "I normally rise about eight. Papa John doesn't get up until later. I may write some letters. There's drawin' classes. That takes until perhaps eleven. I study music until noon—"

"I saw the instruments. What do you play?"

"Piano, harpsichord—"

"—guitar and flute," he finished, and they laughed together.

"You're observant, Mr. Carver," Jane Terrill said.

"Please go on," Ezra asked. "What do you do after lunch?"

"After lunch I study French or Latin grammar, or write essays. At four I have my dancin' class, and I usually ride before dinner."

"I begin to feel foolish for observing that you lead an uneventful life," Ezra said. "Are your evenings as busy?"

"Oh, we just read, or play word games," Jane Terrill said, smiling deprecatingly.

"What do you read?"

"Goodness, you do want to know everything, don't you?" she said. "Well, I just finished *Don Quixote*. Papa John says I should read *Robinson Crusoe* next. Have you read it?"

"Yes," Ezra said. "It's a good story. They say it is based on fact."

"Yes," Jane Terrill replied. They were in front of the house once more, and she stopped now and looked up at him. Her smile was shy and yet confident, her stance at once defensive and aggressive.

"Well," he said.

"I expect we shall meet at dinner," she said.

"I look forward to it," he said, and watched her go up the steps and into the house. Perhaps it wasn't going to be as hard to stay at Fairacres as he had at first feared.

The days drifted past like feathers in the breeze. Ezra found that he could not take his eyes off Jane Terrill. She was unlike any woman he had ever met. When she was not watching—or when he thought she was not watching, which was by no means one and the same thing—he feasted his eyes on her slim form, her honey-blond hair, her elegant hands and slender forearms. He delighted in the soft cadences of her voice and the long-drawn-out vowels and lilting verbs of her speech. He spent a considerable amount of time and ingenuity thinking up excuses for seeking her out and talking to her. He learned Jane Terrill's daily routine from the servants and workers, contriving to "bump into her" "accidentally", much to their mutual "surprise". He was about as subtle as a stampeding elephant, and everyone on the plantation watched indulgently as the big Yankee blundered about. It was not unusual for visiting gentlemen to fall beneath Jane Terrill's cool charm. It was just a mite harder on Mr. Carver than most, him being from the North.

The strange thing about it all was, of course, that Ezra had absolutely no thought of marriage. He had always attracted women, and there were plenty of them in New York and Boston. There is something about money and power that attracts a certain kind of woman as a flame attracts moths. Ezra had had a few of those around him, and had taken his pleasures where he found them. Everybody knew where they stood. There was no talk of love in such relationships. "Marriage," he always said, "is like jumping into an icy lake. It takes but an instant to regret it and a lifetime to recover from the shock of it." He had no time for shillyshallying when there was a world waiting to be won.

Jane said nothing. Any girl with two older brothers soon learns to keep her feelings to herself. She ignored their gentle teasing now, as she pretended not to see the knowing smiles of her parents. As for Ezra, he was a good-looking man, although in many ways unsophisticated. He would be gone from her life in a matter of days, weeks at the most. No matter how attracted to him she might be—and Jane confessed (to her mirror) that she was—she did not let it show. Jane was a wise girl as well as a pretty one, and knew that it is the fiercest fires which die the quickest. If Ezra Carver was serious, there was no hurry.

So, for all the time he was at Fairacres, Ezra suffered. Papa John, who was crafty enough for two, and his wife Claudette, who was even subtler than he, saw to it that Ezra's "accidental" encounters with their daughter hardly ever occurred while she was alone or unchaperoned. They also saw to it that on the few occasions when Jane might be alone with Mr. Carver—out riding, for instance—Ezra was given a horse so skittish that he spent most if not all of his time keeping an eye on it and proportionately less on any notions of a romantic nature.

"Doesn't do to give youngsters too much of a free rein, isn't it?" Papa John said to his wife as they undressed for bed. "They're all a lot less, um, ah, inhibited these days, if you ask me."

Claudette Terrill smiled and said nothing. John Terrill had been many things as a suitor, but inhibited was not one of them.

"I think I quite like our Mr. Carver," she said later in the dark.

"What?" said John Terrill drowsily.

"Young Mr. Carver," she said. "I think he'll do very well."

"No doubt of that," Papa John concurred, wondering as men have wondered since time began why it was that when he wanted to go to sleep his wife always wanted to talk, and when he wanted to talk she always wanted to go to sleep. "He's got go, that young fellow. Lots of it."

"Yes, John," Claudette Terrill said, turning on her side and smiling into the darkness. That wasn't what she had meant at all.

Dinner at Fairacres was an event. The table groaned with duck and turkey, goose, beef, mutton. There were sweet corn and potatoes, grits and tomatoes and peas. There was soup, there was fish; there was wine and wine and wine. Ten people sat down to the meal, only three of whom actually lived in the house: John and Claudette Terrill and their daughter, Jane. The Jeffersons had come across from Eastover, the other side of Richmond, a hearty couple who met all introductions with a disclaimer of relationship with the third President of the United States. Wesley Otway and his wife Clara had come all the way up from Charleston with bouquets of jonquils and hyacinths grown from bulbs originally imported from Holland. Ebenezer Gresford, the Terrill family lawyer, was a tall, spare man who wore the new, unusual-looking bifocal spectacles. The local parson, the Reverend Charles Francis Mapleton, was as round and fat as Friar Tuck himself, and much given to homily and cliché, delivered between huge bites of turkey leg which he waved and stabbed for emphasis.

The talk was of horses, dogs, guns, duels, racing, breeding, politics, local and national. Of crops and animals, fruit trees and feeding and the prices of all. There was gossip about old friends and stories from all quarters: Ezra in particular being asked many questions about life in New York. He told them about the fashions, the scandals, the movers and shakers of his adoptive home town. Of Mrs. William Westmore, who had appeared at a party wearing

a dress which had cost, with jewels, thirty thousand dollars. Of the two-hour cotillion at the costume ball given by Mrs. William Calford Schemerhorn at her mansion on the corner of Lafayette Place and Great Jones Street. Of "Commodore" Vanderbilt, living in his palatial home on Washington Place, with eleven million dollars invested giving him a return on his money of twenty-five per cent per annum, yet still shunned by fashionable society. Of A. T. Stewart's emporium, where ladies could buy French laces, Irish linens, Brussels carpets, Lyons silks, Paris gloves, and dresses, English woollens and cashmere shawls, some of which cost as much as two thousand dollars.

"Ostentation, sir!" Wesley Otway boomed. "Damnable ostentation!"

"The way people spend money in the cities is nothin' short of scan'lous!" Henry Jefferson added.

"Timothy six, verse ten!" Reverend Mapleton cried, waving a chicken leg vaguely towards Ezra. He was bleary-eyed with wine, and there was gravy on his black jacket. "Timothy six, verse ten!"

"The love of money is the root of all evil?" quoted John Terrill. "I don't know that I'd necessarily agree with that. How about you, Mr. Carver?"

"I think I prefer 'Money is the wise man's religion'," Ezra said.

"Well put, my boy," John Terrill smiled. He nodded at Jane as much as to say, There, you see. She smiled back, but not at Ezra.

"Thoreau put it best, John," Gresford said, surveying them all over the top of his bifocals like a backwoods schoolteacher. "Didn't he say something to the effect that plenty of men know how to make a dollar, but only one in a million knows how to spend it?"

"Right, absolutely right," Wesley Otway said. "Y'see, that's our great strength here in the South, Mr. Carver. We spend our money on livin', sir, an' not on fripperies. Two thousand dollars for a cassimere shawl, indeed!"

"Yet you invest very little of your money in business," Ezra said. "Why is that?"

"Invest, sir? In *business*, sir?" Wesley Otway looked at Ezra as though something obscene had been suggested.

"A gentleman has more things on his mind than grabbin' after money, Mr. Carver!"

"Well, I—" Ezra began, and then stopped as Claudette Terrill rose from her chair at the end of the table.

"Ladies," she said, "I think perhaps we ought to leave the gentlemen to their brandy and cigars."

The liveried servants hastened to open the doors to the drawing-room, while a young black boy brought wooden boxes of Havana cigars to John Terrill at the head of the table. The port and brandy decanters were set beside him as the dining-room doors were again closed. Cigars were clipped and lighted, the decanters sent upon their ritual round of the table.

"In the North, Mr. Carver," Wesley Otway continued, "it appears to us people set greater store by their machinery than they do the equality of their lives. Sweat shops and factories—is that how our Creator intended us to live?"

"Perhaps not, sir," Ezra said, choosing his words with care. It would be perilously easy to give offense: men like Otway took the slightest wrong inflection as insult. "My intention was to indicate that the South puts itself at risk by not following the example of the industrialized North."

"At risk?" Ebenezer Gresford said. "How, at risk?"

"As I see it, the South has all its capital tied up in two commodities, gentlemen," Ezra said, warming to the topic. "One is land, the other slaves. Capital tied up in this manner cannot be made to grow, or invested in machinery or commerce which will make it grow. The North judges achievement on the basis of visible productivity. The South judges it on the basis of visible ownership. I've heard it said many times that a man's wealth here is measured by what he owns in land or slaves or both."

"I think you're misinformed, my boy," John Terrill said benevolently, "as are many Northerners. Y'all have the same idea, that the South is full of slave plantations. It isn't so. Why, there can't be more than two hundred and fifty men in the country owning a hundred slaves. Isn't it?"

"Not that many even, John," Gresford corrected. "And those all a long way south of here."

"Correct," Terrill said. "The Tidewater farms and small

plantations like this one can't run to the prices slaves fetch in New Orleans. A good field hand will fetch \$1500 or more at one of Ike Franklin's auctions, I'm told. Isn't it?"

"That's why we have to take good care of our workers, Mr. Carver," Henry Jefferson said. "They can be stolen, sold down the river. They fetch good money, as John says."

"Besides, we're not slavers, we don't own slaves," said Otway. "What could be less incentive for a man to work than he be a slave?"

"I agree with you, Mr. Otway," Ezra said. "I still contend that more industry would serve the South better than emancipation. Do you know that less than ten per cent of all manufactured goods in the United States originate in the South? You have four million people, and every one of them is consuming more than he produces. Why, in New Orleans, gentlemen, a city of more than ten thousand inhabitants, there isn't even a single bookshop!"

"I doubt your points are relevant, Carver," Jefferson said, authority in his quiet voice. "We are agrarian both by nature and inclination. If our four million people are consuming more than they produce, it's because of the land, its history, its heritage. It is our way of life, sir, and I do not know that we would wish to change it. Perhaps you are right, and perhaps we should. But I do not know if we can. I do not know even if any of us would wish to."

"Well said, Henry, damned well said!" Otway crowed, banging on the table with the flat of his hand. Glass and silverware shook and jingled.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Ezra said, holding his hand palm out to stem the outburst. "I'm not proseletysing! All I am suggesting is that Southern businessmen might do well to consider some forms of capital investment in business or productive industry, for the South is in dire economic straits. Right now, more than half of its people are borrowing against October's harvest to pay for April's seed. The staple commerces upon which you all depend are totally vulnerable to pestilence, to changes in markets you cannot control, to outside influences you are unaware of. Why, I read in *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* that it costs three dollars to move one bale of cotton to the seaboard,

and another fifteen in freight, insurance, storage and port fees to ship it to Europe. Should hard times come, how would your business survive?"

"We have managed so far," John Terrill said. "And there is little alternative anyway. We cannot cease growing cotton or tobacco, so we must continue."

"Of course," Ezra said. "However, if you have other resources, redeploy them. You have shipping interests, sir, I believe. Examine them, see if there are ways to make them grow. That's the kind of thing I mean."

"I see," John Terrill said, his eyes thoughtful. I wonder if I went too far too fast, Ezra thought, but the old man's eyes did not meet those of Ebenezer Gresford. Ezra let a silent sigh of relief escape from his lips.

"Well, it's a point of view, I suppose," Otway said. "Now shall we join the ladies?"

As the gentlemen rose and began noisily to join their wives in the drawing-room, John Terrill tapped Ezra on the shoulder and motioned him to stay.

"Shipping," he said softly, so as the others would not hear. "I take it you mentioned it a-purpose?"

"Yes sir, I did," Ezra said, thinking John Terrill was a lot sharper than he pretended to be. "I'd like to talk to you about Merchants Express."

"I see," Terrill said. "What do you want?"

"Mostly I want opportunity," Ezra said. "I think I could make Merchants Express a highly profitable enterprise. But I need your help to do it."

"You shall have it, I think," John Terrill said. "We'll talk about it at a more appropriate time. One other question, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Why would you want to do all this for a poor old Tidewater farmer, Mr. Carver? Why are you so honoring me?"

"I wasn't entirely thinking of you, sir," Ezra said.

"Ah," John Terrill smiled. "Jane."

"You're much too clever for me, sir," Ezra said.

"I seriously doubt that, young man," Terrill said. "Let's talk of this tomorrow. You won't mind if Gresford is there, will you?"

"Of course not," Ezra said, damning the luck that had brought the lawyer visiting at this particular juncture. Then he caught the glimpse of mischievous, almost malicious, humor in old John Terrill's eyes, and realized it was nothing at all to do with luck. The older man had out-thought him all the way. He laughed, and John Terrill nodded, enjoying his moment. Then he began to laugh too.

They were still smiling when they went into the drawing-room.

The following morning John Terrill signed an agreement in principle, witnessed by Ebenezer Gresford, which gave Ezra Carver control of his shareholding in Merchants Express. Anxious to get back to New York and put the rest of his plan into action, Ezra arranged to leave on the morning of the following day.

There was one more thing to do before he left. Papa John agreed to Ezra's request for a moment alone with Jane before parting. The old man had grinned like a naughty boy and patted Ezra's arm, saying he would see what he could do, never knowing, any more than Ezra, that his wife and daughter had made their own decisions and arrangements long before either of the men.

Jane was waiting for Ezra in the library. Her dress was white, elegant and lovely. Her dark-blond hair was done in ringlets that fell to her shoulders. Ezra felt a sudden pang of awareness, a sense that he would miss her. She looked both nervous and self-possessed. He did not know that she was really quite frightened of what he was going to say.

"Miss Terrill—Jane," he began. His throat was tight, and when he cleared it the noise seemed thunderous. "I wondered whether before I leave I might tell you what is on my mind."

"Yes?" she said. If only she would help, Ezra thought, if only she would say something to help. He knew she never would. For an agonized moment he regretted having asked to see her. Perhaps it would have been better just to have left.

"There is so much that I wanted to say that I have not said," he managed. "Perhaps you would permit me to write to you?"

"Write to me?" she said. "Can you not tell me what it is you wish to say?"

"I . . . uh . . . dammit, I . . . I beg your pardon but I . . . Jane, I just don't seem able to do that at the moment."

"Come, Mr. Carver," she said, "try." She touched his hand with cool fingertips.

He tried to take her hand but she had already withdrawn it.

Her eyes were cool, direct, fathomless. What was she telling him? Go ahead? Do not dare to speak? What?

"I haven't told you much about myself," he managed finally. "What I have done. What I hope to achieve."

"There hasn't been time," she said.

"No, there hasn't," he agreed, knowing that there had been a dozen times when he wanted to talk to her about the future, and had hung back, reluctant to do so lest he commit himself to her in doing it. Do I want her? he wondered now, do I really want to say anything? If only there was some way of explaining it. He knew that the idea of marrying Jane Terrill had become a central fact of his life, but he did not know why. It was as if he had been waiting for the right woman to come into his life, and she was the one. Yet it disturbed him that he could not define why she was.

"I have great plans, Jane," he said. "You know that your father has given me control of Merchants Express."

"He has a very high opinion of you," she said. "He thinks you will go very far, Mr. Carver. And so do I."

The warmth of her last words encouraged Ezra, and his heart jumped. It was just the encouragement he needed.

"I would like to come back soon," he said. "To see you."

Jane Terrill smiled, and ducked her head, avoiding his eyes for a moment. Then she looked up, directly meeting his gaze.

"I think I would like that," she said.

"Then may I speak to your father?"

"I think you should," she said gravely.

"I'll do it right away," he said, standing up and taking both her hands in his. "Right now."

"Right now?" she said. There was something in her eyes—mischief? laughter? Before he could decide she lifted herself on tiptoes and kissed him. Then she was gone, running lightfooted from the library. Ezra stood alone in the slanting sunlight coming through the tall, mullioned windows. "Well," he said aloud to himself, "you've done it." He did not know for sure how he felt about it yet. There was so much else to be done. It could be a terrible mistake. No, he thought, it's not a mistake. Jane was a fine girl, and they would make a good match. He wondered if this was love. He had no experience of love, but perhaps this glow of accomplishment, satisfaction, triumph even, was what they all talked about. He didn't feel mooneyed, excited, delirious, none of the classic symptoms. He had always suspected that was a load of nonsense put about by vapping novelists, anyway. He felt strong and sure and good, and that was enough. He went out of the library to find Papa John.

An hour later he climbed into the carriage. The grinning Benjamin Agamemnon was perched in the driver's seat, ready to go. Everyone came to the porch to wave goodbye except Jane's brothers, who made no secret of their displeasure at Papa John's decision to hand control of the family shipping interests over to Ezra Carver, and were disdainful of his becoming a member of the family. Now that it was an accomplished fact that he would pay court to Jane Terrill, Ezra found his emotion torn. He shook hands gravely with Papa John, kissed Claudette Terrill's hand and chastely, awkwardly, kissed Jane's cool cheek. It was like being in a play, he thought.

He was not prepared for the feeling of relief he felt when Benjamin Agamemnon clucked the bays into a trot, but he knew he was glad to get away from Fairacres. It's just nerves, he told himself, it will be better next time. His doubts, his misgivings increased as they headed away from the farm. He wondered what they would all say back in New York, in Boston. He tried to visualize the faces of his family, his colleagues, his enemies when they heard the news that the Back Bay Bastard was in love. What with? they'd ask.

Jane Terrill knew that she was attractive, and she used her attractiveness unconsciously. She learned in her early teens that pretty girls got away with things plain girls couldn't. If Papa John was stern, she smiled and kissed him on the top of his head. His anger evaporated immediately, no matter what its original cause. The grave young men who came to visit Fairacres, friends of John or James from school, were just as easy to handle. One simply maintained a challenging coolness, delighting in its effect upon them. By her sixteenth birthday Jane was well aware of men and of how to deal with them. Mama Claudette's French background added a dimension of understanding and charm which, mingled with a hint that perhaps abandon lay sleeping behind her coolness, led many a young gallant to pay court to Jane, and not a few to seek her hand in marriage. Yet she had never felt that powerful undertow of attraction for any one of them. They were charming, romantic, and yet somehow bloodless. They only talked of passion, since none of them was ever given a real opportunity of communicating it. Of course, like all young girls, Jane flirted with boys of her own age. There were stolen kisses on the veranda, the usual love letters swearing undying devotion, flowers pressed in books, the sighs and pains of adolescence, but that was all they were. No young woman of Jane Terrill's education and background ever thought of any other relationship with a man than marriage. Her husband would be the first and only man ever to possess her, Jane knew, and so she waited through girlhood to womanhood, confident that he would one day walk into her life and she would know him the moment he did. If she had tried to draw a picture of him, the last man on earth he would have resembled would have been Ezra Carver.

She frequently became annoyed with herself at her inability to analyze what it was about him which attracted her. He was, to begin with, shorter than most of the men she knew, and Jane liked taller men. Ezra was bearded and dark, while she preferred fair, clean-shaven men. He did none of the things the young men she knew liked to do, and made no secret of his disinterest in them. Riding to hounds, hunting, shooting, breeding and racing horses

were pastimes with which Ezra Carver had neither patience nor sympathy. Somehow, in a way that Jane was unable to explain to herself, this made him more rather than less attractive. She did not even like his name.

He was strong and capable and—when he wanted to be—witty, charming even. Yet she thought long, alone in her bed, of the things she would have to give up if she married him. To become Ezra Carver's wife meant saying good-bye to the *douce* life of Fairacres, to her friends and family—especially John and James, whose hostility towards Ezra increased with his every visit. Yet there was an excitement about a future in the gritty bustle of New York, and she knew, without knowing how, that Ezra was going to be successful. There was just something about him that made her sure of it. He gave her confidence, as though he had more than enough to share. Much of what he told her was as foreign as if it had been Russian, but she tried hard and felt that perhaps he was rewarded in telling her, in sharing. His business affairs were so involved, so confusing, that she feared she would never understand them, but Ezra never seemed to tire of explaining his plans. He was afire with enthusiasms. His transportation system was complete; now that he had control of Merchants Express he could move the ships around any way he wanted to. Carver Shipping was providing a complete scheduled service to California via Nicaragua, where Jack Summerville was still pushing his "b'ilers" up the river to the lake. With good Carver ships to take them to San Juan and others to ferry them up to San Francisco, the miners had as good a service as any gold-hungry fool had a right to expect. The fares, although high, were no more than a man expected to pay. They were also highly profitable to Ezra Carver; the five-hundred-dollar one-way fare put \$150 into his coffers for every man his ships carried.

"I'm just biding my time, Jane," he told her. "One of these days I'll make my move."

"But wouldn't that mean risking the present business, Ezra?" Jane asked.

"Yes," he said. "There isn't any other way."

"I see," she said. She did not want to tell him that his talk of risking everything frightened her, but it did. Sup-

pose it all went wrong? It was not just Ezra's capital; her father's was also involved, and his loss would be cataclysmic for him. She never revealed any of her misgivings to Ezra. Jane had been taught never to challenge the decisions made by the men in her family: if Ezra said it was right, then it was so. Some of the misgivings remained, however. There were times when he was impetuous and stubborn, and she recognized these traits better than he did.

They were married at Fairacres in the summer of 1852. Theo's business in Sacramento was improving, Ezra said. His brother was planning to set up in San Francisco shortly and, if all went well, they would visit him there in the new year. For their honeymoon Ezra chartered an ocean-going yacht and called her only Jenny—and they sailed in her to the Caribbean. She was a lovely ship, 260 feet long, with a beam of thirty-eight feet, long and sleek, and capable of crossing any sea. Her dining-room was walled in yellow marble from the Pyrenees, and panelled with Carrara. The stateroom ceiling was patterned in green and white interleaved with real gold that Ezra said was worth more than twenty thousand dollars. Jane thought the whole ship so outrageously ostentatious that she could do nothing but love it. She smashed a bottle of champagne over its stern for luck, and they sailed for Cuba and their honeymoon.

Although he was gentle with her, truly gentle, their union was painful to Jane. She had no real conception of the brutality of sex, and at first she found the whole thing ugly and totally distasteful. But there were long, languid nights in the soft Caribbean moonlight when Ezra would open a bottle of champagne and they would sit in lounging chairs on the rear deck and sip the cold wine and talk, and gradually, gradually, the fear in Jane diminished, and she came to their bed ready for him, willing, and finally astonished at the depth and strength of her own responses. She asked Ezra often if he was happy now, and he unflinchingly replied he was. Yet she sensed some other impatience in him that worried her, until one day he told her they were putting into San Juan, Nicaragua, where he had some business to attend to. Wisely, Jane made no protest; she

was already discovering that with her new husband his business affairs were never far from his mind. Even in their most intimate aloneness there was a part of Ezra which was never totally committed to her. She sensed it now. Later she would know it for a fact and accept it as another woman accepts the fact that her husband snores.

She went ashore with Ezra only once. San Juan del Norte was so filthy, so appallingly poor that she could not understand how the people managed to cling to life. She walked with him, fascinated and repelled by what she saw. Everywhere they went a silent crowd of wide-eyed native children followed, naked as the day they were born, watching Jane's every movement with a fascination no less fearful than her own.

"They don't see all that many fair-haired wimmins, lady," old Jack Summerville told her. "Prob'ly thinks you ain't too healthy, like as not." Ezra had brought the Dutchman downriver for business talk, and Jane warmed to the bearded, stocky old sailor immediately. There wasn't an ounce of pretence about him. When they showed him around *The Jenny* she asked him what he thought of the ship. Summerville spat over the rail and shook his head.

"Be afeared to sail in her, so I would, lady," he said. He always called her "lady," never anything else; not Mrs. Carver, nor "ma'am," just "lady." It seemed that the word was his highest form of respectful salute.

"Oh, really, Mr. Summerville?" she laughed. "And why, pray?"

"Might belch," Summerville said.

She was still laughing when Ezra joined them, and they had a pleasant luncheon aboard, during which Summerville told her stories of his adventures piloting privateers in the 1812 war.

"Them was ticklish times, so they was," he said, leaning back and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Damn ticklish." His napkin lay still folded beside his plate; he did not know what it was for.

"Now, then, Mr. Carver," he said, patting his belly and pulling out a blackened clay pipe. "Let's you and me talk about this surveyor feller you've sent out here to skeer the natives!"

"Yes, yes," Ezra said hastily. "In a moment. My dear, this is business. I fear you'll find it very boring. Perhaps you'd prefer to take your nap?"

Jane rose, and smiled at Summerville, who was scrambling to his feet belatedly. "Very well," she said. "I'll leave you both to your boring business. Good day, Mr. Summerville."

"Good day, lady," Summerville said. "Sleep with your feet p'intin' south."

"South?" Jane echoed.

"South," Summerville said, as though conferring the secrets of the ages upon her. "Sleep like a babe, you will."

"Very well," she said, giving Ezra a kiss on the cheek. "I'll try it."

"Aye," Summerville said, and struck a match on his pants with a noise like cracking of a whip. By the time she closed the door he was puffing clouds of black smoke that stung her nostrils all the way back to her stateroom. She wondered why Ezra had sent a surveyor to Nicaragua. What could anyone possibly want to build in such a God-forsaken wilderness? Even the California-bound miners spent no more time in San Juan than they had to. Ezra said it was a pest-hole, and yet he had a surveyor working here. She dozed off, reminding herself to ask him about it.

They were away for a month, and returned to New York to find that Carver Shipping was in trouble. Perhaps it was trouble that Ezra should have expected, but he was surprised nonetheless to learn that his activities had attracted the attention of a couple of the vultures hanging around the Exchange. Charles Graham and Ephraim D. Peterson had taken a long, close look at the statistics of the Nicaraguan operation, and concluded that with two thousand men a month heading for the gold fields via San Juan—not to mention the freight which accompanied the caravans—it was time someone took Ezra Carver's business over. "I have to go to Europe," he told his wife. "We need money."

"Can't Papa John?..."

"No, my dear, nor Theo, either. I don't want to be seen borrowing. I'd rather do it where there are fewer snoopers to know how much I've raised and how I've raised it."

"When will you go?"

"As soon as I can," Ezra said. "I haven't much time."

"Is it bad, Ezra?" Jane asked. "Very bad, I mean?"

"Bad enough," he said. "But I'll get through. I've worked too damned hard building this to let anyone steal it away from me."

He said it with his usual conviction and, as usual, Jane believed him. He had never failed. She could not imagine that he ever would. She took Ezra's strength for granted. It was not that she was complacent, but rather that she had never known anything else. She had always been loved and protected. There had always been someone there to take care of her. That was the way life was, straightforward and simple. You were born, your parents loved you, you grew up, you got married, you had children, you were happy. That was how it was because that was how it was supposed to be.

"I know you will," she said, not noticing the fleeting look of anger that touched Ezra's face. She takes it all so much for granted, he thought, surprised at his own anger.

"It isn't all that easy, you know," he said. "I could fail."

"Not you, Ezra," she said.

God, I wish I was that sure, he thought.

"Will you be all right?" he asked, suppressing doubt, irritation.

"Yes, of course," Jane said. She had a secret smile on her face. "I'll have quite enough on my mind for the next few months."

"What on earth—?" he began, and then he looked at her and saw the madonna smile, and he knew. "A baby?" he said. "When?"

"In the spring," she said. "Are you pleased, Ezra? Is it what you wanted?"

"I don't know," he said, and it was the truth. I'm not ready to be a father, he thought. I haven't been a husband all that long. "I'll have to try and get used to the idea."

"You will," she said. "You'll be a good father."

"Yes," Ezra said, thinking, I haven't got time for all that now.

Meanwhile, all New York waited to see what his next move would be. Newspaper reporters besieged his office in

Hanover Square, but after a little while their interest waned and so did that of the Exchange. It looked as if Carver was sinking without firing a shot. He had gone to Europe, oh, yes, of course, nudge, wink. The house on 11th Street was closed, Carver's wife visiting her people in Virginia. The Back Bay Bastard had been put to flight, tail between his legs. Graham and Peterson were bought many a drink in Broadway clubs by men not at all saddened to see Ezra Carver brought down.

Ezra Carver was anything but down. He was as busy as he had ever been in his life, talking to financiers and investors in London, dining with brokers and merchants, booming his "new venture," an even shorter and easier route across the Panama isthmus to California, with prices half those presently obtaining. What about this new firm, Interocean? he was asked. They'll never sail their first boatload, he predicted confidently. Every man bound for California will travel with me—and why not, at half the price and in half the time? They listened to him respectfully—after all, he had pioneered the Nicaraguan route and made it pay handsome profits. By the time he was ready to leave London Ezra had lined up support from a dozen men whose names carried as much weight in New York as they did in London. Of course, he did not tell them that most of his assets consisted of patched-up steamers and clapped-out freighters bought for a song or a downpayment. There was, after all, no reason on earth why he should guarantee them less risk than he would gladly take himself.

He came back to New York via the isthmus, where he had no difficulty at all in getting Summerville and the rest of the men who had worked for him in Nicaragua to promise to come over to the new enterprise as soon as it got under way. He made his announcement of that enterprise a few days after his return, and Graham and Peterson watched in dismay as customers they had signed up flocked to make better deals with Ezra Carver's new company, reneging on their existing arrangements with no more compunction than a seal eats herring.

Graham and Peterson panicked, as Ezra had hoped they would. They sent an intermediary to make peace overtures, and Ezra listened gravely to their proposition. They

would pay him three-quarters of a million dollars for the assets, goodwill and name of his new company. Ezra agreed, and took the money. Then he left Nicaragua forever. He had no more use for it, for any of them. Let them go back to growing bananas and breeding children, they had served their purpose. Graham and Peterson the butt of cheap jokes on the Exchange in New York. The Back Bay Bastard had done it again. It doesn't do to cross Ezra Carver, they said, you've got to watch him; always knew he'd pull it off.

"Did you have to do it the way you did, Ezra?" Jane asked him one night. "Was it necessary to absolutely ruin those men?"

"They would happily have ruined me, Jane," he protested.

"That begs the question," she said. "Was it necessary to break them—in public? To show the world what a cruel man you are?"

Ezra frowned. He had not thought about it that deeply. They had set out to ruin him and he had stopped them. He had said that he would do it in the newspapers, and so he had done it. It had never occurred to him to wonder whether it was necessary.

"You don't understand," he said. "You leave business to me."

"Explain it, then," Jane said. "So that I can understand."

"I don't know how to tell you so you'd understand."

"Isn't it enough for you to win, Ezra?"

"Yes," he said. "Most times. Sometimes it's not enough, though. Sometimes you have to let everyone see that you're winning. People want that, Jane. They want to see someone win, someone lose. People wanted to see me humbled or them busted. It's as if seeing someone go under, everyone else feels more secure."

"It seems cruel," Jane said. "Soulless."

"It often is," he said. "That's why I don't think I can explain it in a way that you'd understand."

"Oh, Ezra," she said. "I want you to tell me. I don't want to be one of those women who don't clearly know

how or why their husbands do what they do. I want to understand."

You can't, he thought, not ever. It's like a bird trying to explain how it flies to a snail.

"I would have thought you had enough to worry about," he smiled, patting her rounding belly. "Getting ready to take care of our son."

"He's going to be a big strong boy," she said. "Like his daddy."

Ezra concealed his grimace by getting up and going across to the sideboard for the whisky decanter. He couldn't abide baby-talking women, and Jane knew it. She hurried into the silence which would otherwise have followed with a question.

He was born in 1828, the sixth of Patrick Malone's nine children. Big Paddy, powerful, surly and improvident, cared little for his wife and less for the brats she spawned with clockwork regularity. All Paddy Malone needed was enough money for whisky, and the fulling mill at Wheeling Township provided that most of the time. When it didn't, Paddy would go from door to door like a tinker, offering to sharpen knives and scissors, mend umbrellas, solder pans and the like. He had no pride; Charlie always hated him for that. Paddy's five sons and four daughters worked the thirty-acre farm, and such education as they got was given them in the one-room schoolhouse that operated four months of the year when the Township could get a teacher. Paddy didn't hold with all that damned education nonsense either; he'd not spent his life with his nose in books, he said, and saw no reason why his sons should.

By the time Charlie was fourteen his father was disgraced, read out of the church and reported to the selectmen for not being able to support his family. Charlie and his brother John, younger by two years, were taken away from the farm on what the townspeople called Poverty Hill and bound out to a local farmer. A dour Scot with principles as deep rooted as redwood trees, Alexander Taylor paid Charlie seven dollars a month and his keep, and told him he was lucky to get it.

Charlie was no farm boy: nothing in him felt any affinity for the land. He lay awake for long hours in the bed that

he shared with Johnny and dreamed of running away to the West. After a year on the Taylor place he actively hated the sight of a reap hook or flax swingle. It was all pointless: the endless work, the constant battle against a Nature infinitely better equipped than puny Man. Squirrels dug up the corn you planted, and deer ate what little grew. Coons and foxes decimated the chickens. Cougars sneaked up on the barns in search of prey; one time a bear lifted a goat out of a pen slick as grease.

In the long winter evenings Clara Taylor would read stories about Benjamin Franklin to Charlie and Johnny, emphasizing what a frugal, hardworking fellow he had been. Like Mr. Taylor, she would say, as old Alex nodded away in the background, his steel rimmed spectacles glinting in the soft yellow light of the oil lamp. The Taylors revered Franklin and strove to emulate his example. They did not seem able to guess, as Charlie instinctively did, that the real reason for Franklin's rise from rags was his combination of brains, push and sheer luck.

When his bound year was up Charlie got a job with Jan Fontijn, a big Dutchman who ran a little store from the front room of his cabin. Fontijn loaded a wagon with stuff he couldn't even give away in Wheeling and sent Charlie out on the road with it to see what he could do in return for ten per cent of whatever profit he could turn. It was no hardship for Charlie to turn his back on the narrow meannesses of his home town. The whole world was waiting for him out there along the Trace, and all he had to do was let the old horse pull him there.

For three years Charlie drifted around the countryside, returning only occasionally to replenish his stocks. He ate and slept wherever he could, a haystack or the bed of the wagon on warm summer nights. When fall stripped the leaves off the trees he could always beg a place by a tavern fireside, or in the kitchen of some backwoods farmhouse. He taught himself to play the fiddle, a skill that earned him many a good meal and not a few admiring smiles from buxom country lasses in the farms he called at. If a man can make music he'll always have women, Charlie said.

By the time he was eighteen and full grown Charlie was confident, able and well fixed. He had scraped together a

hundred and twenty-six dollars, more money than anyone in the Malone family had ever had. He went home, and at first no one knew him, a wiry fellow with dark hair, strong-looking, burned brown by the outdoors, wearing serge and not homespun, and leather shoes. He gave his widowed mother twenty-five dollars and then he went to New York to see the elephant. It was something everyone wanted to see, a huge wooden restaurant on the boardwalk at Coney Island. People came from all over the world just to eat there. The walls inside were festooned with ribbons from the hats of sailors, the names of their ships still visible in tarnished gold: *Agamemnon*, *Euphrates*, *Marie-Louise*, *Carinthia*. He stayed at the St. Nicholas Hotel on Broadway, eating gigantic meals in its marbled dining-room. Strolling on the bustling sidewalks up Fifth Avenue, he marvelled at the city and even more at the fact that he, Charlie Malone, was actually in it, living like a nob.

He listened to what he was told by people who knew their rackets, and put on old clothes to go down to Five Points to buy clocks and silverware and costume jewellery. The pawnshops in the Points got the best of the dips' loot, and there was plenty of good stuff to be had for a fraction of its worth. Charlie worked his way through all the big warehouses downtown, picking up (at a heavy discount) notes defaulted on by country merchants he knew or knew of and undertaking to collect them when he went out on the road again. When he'd had his fill of the city—and it didn't take long: Charlie got the urge to quit most places almost as soon as he'd got himself settled in—he hit the road. By spring he was far out in the empty wilderness once more.

During the next eighteen months Charlie ranged as far afield as Indiana, heading south as winter closed in. There were plenty of country towns—no more than villages, most of them—and plenty of taverns, and not a few lusty wenches to be tumbled, flush-faced and giggling, down along the reed-choked banks of rivers or in the cathedral-like stillness of the woods. Afterwards they all wanted to talk of love and getting wed, but Charlie Malone was having none of that. He had no mind to do any more farming, no inclination to raise a parcel of snot-nosed brats to

whine at his heels for the best twenty years of his life. There was always the road that lay ahead, seen between the nodding ears of the old mare; always another hill to see the far side of, a new face to make the acquaintance of, another song so sing.

He probably believed it all when he said it, but he said it before he met Sarah Hutchinson. Not a conventional beauty by any means, but there was a dancing light behind her dark eyes, a fine intelligence in her, and pride in the way she carried her head and body. Eighteen she was, with a voice that still had the lilt of County Wicklow in it, and hair as dark as a raven's wing. The first time Charlie Malone set eyes on her in Fort Des Moines he forgot every other woman he had ever known.

When he had five hundred dollars in cash saved up Charlie got all his courage together and spoke to Terence Hutchinson. It wasn't easy for him, for Charlie wasn't used to pleading; he'd never done that. They sat in the living-room of the chinked-log house that sat on the crest of the hill to the north of the township, formal as two old ladies, and Charlie held on to his hat as if it were a life-belt, turning and turning the brim in his stubby-fingered hands, sweating in his good suit as he sipped the bitter, watery tea that Kathleen Hutchinson brought in to them. She used her best china, and mentioned it so Charlie would appreciate the honor.

There was no real obstacle to them wedding, anyway. Sure, Terence Hutchinson was glad to see his daughter spoken for, and that by a doer, not one of those layabout louts that mooned around the cowsheds of nights. Nor was Terence altogether unhappy at the prospect of having one less mouth to feed. Times weren't easy and there'd been a poor crop the preceding spring.

"We'd not be like most, you see," Charlie told Sarah's father. "Marrying first and then looking for a way of life afterwards. That's not my way at all."

"But you'd still travel, Mr. Malone?" Kathleen Hutchinson asked. "You'd still be out on the road?"

"I don't relish the thought of our Sarah left alone so much, friendless in some town of strangers," Terence Hutchinson added.

"It won't be that way," Charlie said. "I've an idea to change my plans some. A partnership in a store."

"A partnership, is it?" Terence Hutchinson queried, looking at his wife. There, you see, his expression said. I told you he was a steady fellow and right for the girl. Kathleen Hutchinson did not allow herself to look pleased.

"A store, is it?" she said.

"Aye," Charlie replied. "Over Kanesville way. There are a couple of men there, Laurie Rodgers and Jack McGowan. We've already spoken of a partnership."

"Well then," Terence Hutchinson said, getting up heavily from the hand-carved wooden stool. "I'd say this calls for a celebration."

Kathleen Hutchinson watched her husband darkly as he went into the storeroom and came out with a stone jug, but she said nothing. Even so, her disapproval was almost tangible. Terence Hutchinson, if he noticed it, ignored it and splashed a goodly measure of the corn liquor into the flowered cups. They clinked them gingerly together as Kathleen Hutchinson winced. Charlie knew that Terence Hutchinson would go on drinking all night now. He was the kind who did, the kind who always said next day he'd quit, but never, ever could or did. The man was touched with bad luck; he had once been a figure of some importance in the township, but he had little left now but the house and a smallholding.

The ceremony itself was, at Sarah's insistence as well as Charlie's, a simple, family affair. All the Hutchinsons' near relations gathered at the house on the hill. The minister was already there, Father Donachy, still as Irish as the day he'd climbed aboard the boat at Cork. Sarah wore her mother's wedding dress. It was made of white satin that had been given to Katie O'Donnell (as she was then) by the lady's-maid in the big house on Clare Hill in Wicklow, the master's gift for her wedding. She had never told Terence anything about the master.

Sarah Hutchinson came to the altar in a glow of womanhood that widened the eyes of more than a few of her cousins down for the marrying; and made them wish they'd come sooner, and oftener. Father Donachy called on the assembled company to declare if there were any objections

to the marriage. Hearing none, he confirmed their union with a short religious formula.

"Now I pronounce you man and wife," he said, and Charlie kissed his bride, who demurely lowered her eyes and blushed. Tea and refreshments followed the ceremony. The children played tag between the legs of grown-ups busily catching up on family and local doings. News and gossip were always welcome; sometimes a body saw no one for weeks on end. There was no one from the Malone family at the wedding. Charlie had told the Hutchinsons that his family were all dead; as far as he was concerned, they were.

The next day Charlie and his bride left Fort Des Moines. There had been no levée, no parading of his prizes: Charlie was not the type. He had what he'd come for and now it was time to move on. He glanced at Sarah, sitting proud and upright at his side in her pretty navy-blue going-away dress.

"I'll make you happy, Sarah," he promised. "I'll give you everything a woman could want."

"I know you will, Charlie," Sarah said, and laid a gentle hand on his arm. Charlie felt valued, strong and important. He started with a huge burst of energy, typical of him, working all hours as they set up the business in Kanessville. That it was a Mormon settlement didn't bother him at first, for he had no feelings one way or the other about religion. With Laurie Rodgers helping in the new store and McGowan out on the road, Charlie found he didn't have all that much to do. The store more or less ran itself once the settling-in was over, and all that remained was the book-keeping, a drudgery that Charlie quickly grew to loathe. As he settled into the routines of the small town, and learned about its people, his customers, he became more and more restive. What did he care who was pregnant, who was to marry, who about to die? What did it matter to him who was in pain, in debt, in love? Sarah detected Charlie's restlessness, correctly diagnosed it, and suggested that he should bring McGowan in off the road and do a little travelling himself. Knowing her right, Charlie shouted Sarah down. He had no idea why. It was the same when she gently suggested that she could do the

book-keeping that Charlie so hated. He railed at her and scoffed and in the end relented when Sarah quietly insisted. She kept the books in a tiny, immaculately accurate script that made Charlie's sloping scrawl look child-like. But she paid dear for the privilege. Charlie would explode at the slightest provocation, as if he felt threatened. His anger was chilling. When she gently reached for him at night to try to make peace, as man and wife will do in the deep, soft warmth of their bed, he turned away from her, deliberately and coldly.

"You don't need me for anything else," he muttered. "You can do without me for that, too."

It was a deep wound for Sarah, and Charlie knew the depth of it, but he would not relent. Thus, quite quickly, they drifted away from each other. Charlie had been at best an untutored lover, but lover he had been to Sarah and the only one she had ever known. There were many, many nights when she lay staring at the blank darkness of the ceiling wondering why Charlie no longer wished to love her and did not want her to love him.

In the spring of 1849, less than a year after they had married, Charlie told Sarah that there was gold in California. Sarah looked up from the shirt she was mending, her eyes shadowed.

"Ah," she said. "I'd heard something about it."

Her voice was soft, contained, and somehow Charlie felt, as he had felt many times, that Sarah knew what he was thinking, what he was going to say next. It was as if Sarah was ahead of him all the time. Worse than that, he felt tolerated, understood as by a mother who knows her child's waywardness. The feelings were obscure and unformed, but they angered Charlie none the less for that. By Charlie's standard a woman was a man's possession. She bent to his will, deferred to his judgement and decisions. Sarah—without ever so much as an overt remark—clearly conveyed the impressions that she had her own thoughts and made her own decisions, no matter what his were. She was deep and dark and cool, was Sarah, and her mind and body were very much her own, marriage or no. Charlie resented it. He felt more and more that even in bed he had never really reached her, never touched her

deeply with his own strength. Sometimes he felt sure there was a private, secret Sarah that he would never be permitted to know unless, somehow, he performed some miracle she would never describe or ask for. His insecurity fed upon his uncertainty, and Charlie grew ever angrier with his stranger wife.

"A man can make a fortune easy as pie, they say," he said. "I've talked it over with Laurie and Jack. They've a mind to join a company and go."

"I see," Sarah said. "And the store. . . ?"

"Couldn't run it alone," Charlie said, pouncing on the opportunity. "I'd have to sell up. Go with them."

"I see," Sarah said again. "And when would you go?"

There it was again, God damn it! Charlie thought. That imperturbable coolness, that infinite capacity to adjust. No tearful surprise, no spate of hows or whys or whats, no questions about how he'd survive—*whether* he'd survive—or how she would get along, the kind of questions that Jack McGowan said his wife had deluged him with. It was almost as if Sarah didn't care whether he stayed or went, and the thought that this was probably true strengthened his resolve to be gone as soon as he could.

"May, June at the latest," he said. "It'd be as well to get out there before all the good land is spoken for."

"It's May in three weeks," Sarah said gently.

"Aye," Charlie said. "I know it."

"You're sure this is what you want to do, Charlie?"

"Aye," Charlie said. "Sure."

"Well then, so be it," Sarah said. She kept her head down and her eyes turned from him so that he would not see the tears. The silence grew until neither of them could break it. Charlie stood by the door, saying nothing. Sarah lifted her head and breathed deeply so that the tears would go away. She thought of the empty future and could not imagine it. She thought of the day she had married Charlie, and how he had turned to her as they left Des Moines and told her he would make her happy. She had been happy, then. Although she had been given little or no choice in marrying Charlie Malone, she had been willing to become his wife because he was tender and kind and always meant well even in his tempers. His callous coldness towards

her, his indifference to her feelings, made her feel totally unwanted; it hurt Sarah deeply to think that Charlie deliberately rejected her love. She knew in her heart of hearts that she was a passionate woman. She knew that, if Charlie had wanted to, he could have touched her heart and awakened it. Had he done so Sarah knew she would have loved him truly and for ever.

"So be it," Charlie said. He felt an enormous frustration, almost anger, at her seemingly placid acceptance of his decision. It was such an important step, such a change in their lives, yet she was treating it as if it were no more important than buying a cabbage. Maybe there was no way to make her care deeply about anything. Certainly there was none to make her care a damn about Charlie Malone.

"Damn you, Sarah!" he snapped. "Don't you know that I might go and never come back, that I might die on the way, anything?"

Sarah turned away now so that Charlie could not see how intense was the pain in her eyes. When she spoke her voice was almost inaudible.

"Would it make any difference, Charlie?" she whispered. "If I asked you not to go, would you stay with me?"

"Well," he said, thinking, would I?

"There you see," Sarah said, without triumph. "I'll not blackmail you into staying. A man has to go free on his way. It's not love to hold him against his wish."

"Love?" Charlie said, striking out to cover his own emotions. "That's a big word for you to be using."

"Yes," Sarah said, her lips pressed together. She stayed in the same position, head turned away from him, and said no more. Charlie looked at her strong, straight, slim back and stifled a curse. He knew that he had hurt her once again by saying what he had just said, knew that he had wanted to hurt her. Yet he did not want to hurt her at all. He wanted to go across to her and take her in his arms and love her, but he did not know how to begin. If only she would come to me, he thought, surrender. He waited for a long, silent moment in case she might turn around, but Sarah remained as still as stone. They spoke no more.

On the fifth day they crossed the San Joaquin and started up from the river towards the foothills. It was pretty, wooded country, with rolling hills and gentle valleys, the grass burned yellow by the relentless sun. They saw herds of elk and wild horses, deer. Once a covey of quail exploded from the undergrowth like a bomb, making the mule shy violently.

"Get on up there, damn you!" McGowan shouted at the animal. "Get on up now!"

They passed a party of men coming down from the diggings and stopped to ask directions. There were five in the party. They looked exhausted, defeated. Their clothes were a uniform shade of gray, muddy and shapeless. They said there was plenty of unstaked ground further up, but that there were already lots of men there.

"Hit don't bother us none," Rodgers grinned. "We're agonta strike it heavy instanter."

"Sure," the leader of the returning party said. If there was any expression in his voice, it was one of forgiveness, an older man forgiving a younger one his folly. Except that he wasn't more than twenty-five himself, Charlie thought.

Just before nightfall they came to Mormon Island. It was just a tent town set on the side of a hill that looked as if a battle had been fought on it. The topsoil was torn away, and the ground was a scrabble of half-dried mud as far as the eye could see. There were about a dozen big

tents, lots of smaller ones. Some of them had makeshift signs hanging on them, or rickety false fronts. One sold liquor, another clothes. There was one where you could buy mining equipment, pans, and timber for cradles. The single muddy streets were seething with men of all ages, and sizes, and nationalities.

"I never thought there'd be this many up here," Charlie said.

"They said in Sacramento this part of the country hadn't been overrun like around the American."

"Mebbe they wasn't lyin'," McGowan said. "Mebbe this is what they mean by not crowded."

"If this is what they calls *quiet*, I'd sure as hell hate to know what they think *noisy's* like," Rodgers grinned. They were in a tent saloon that had no name, just a number. The whisky was cheap and burned the tongue. Rodgers polished his off in one swig and then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He gave a shrug, a typical gesture. It meant he was getting ready to start on something.

"C'mon," he said. "Let's get started buyin' our victuals."

They went down the street to a tent store. There was a long line of men waiting to buy food, even at those prices. McGowan did the buying. He was big and burly. They figured he'd be less likely to get short-changed. McGowan bought twelve pounds of salt pork, some bread, and a pound of sugar. It cost eight dollars and fifty cents. Back home you could have bought the whole lot for less than a dollar.

"You ain't 'back home' no more, boy," Rodgers grinned. "You're in Californy now for sure."

"This is Californy you can keep my share," McGowan said. He didn't like paying fool's prices for ordinary food. His dark eyes had the look of a man who would hit someone if only he could think of a reason for doing it.

"There's gold in the valleys, gold in the mountains," Charlie hummed, teasing Jack. After another moment's glowering McGowan's face creased into a smile.

"All right," he grumbled. "All right then."

"You won't mind the prices when we're all rich, Jack," Charlie said. They all smiled at each other. It was hard to believe that they were on the threshold of making their

fortunes. This grubby scar on the hillside did not look like El Dorado. Charlie looked up at the darkening rim of the hills beyond the ugly scatter of tents. The mountains in the distance were edged with gold by the late evening sun.

"Look," he said. "There's your gold."

McGowan and Rodgers looked up, startled, and then they smiled again when they saw what Charlie meant.

"Pretty," McGowan said. "Damned pretty."

"Let's find someplace to camp," Rodgers said, giving that little shrug of his again. "Tomorrow'll be all hard work."

They unloaded the mule and pitched camp. Their shelter was a tarp staked against the slope of the hill. They dug a hole in the ground, lined it with another tarp for a groundsheet. A passing miner stopped to tell them to sell their mule as soon as they could.

"Cost ye more to feed than it's worth," the man said. His name was Costigan and he hailed from Georgia. He had bad teeth and his breath stank of the rotgut from the tent saloon. He said he had been prospecting since about the beginning of August and had got about four hundred dollars.

"Lost the damned lot buckin' the tiger on Portsmouth Square," he cackled, showing his blackened teeth in an impenitent grin. "Back to the diggings for me, it is."

He thanked them for the coffee and left, admonishing them again to get rid of the mule as fast as they could, before the niggers or the Indians stole it for grub.

It was damp and chilly in the dugout and Charlie shivered until Rodgers lit the oil lamp. Its faintly hissing flame seemed to make the dugout warm, and Charlie stared unseeing at the light as his partners rolled into their blankets and fell asleep. Rodgers started snoring immediately, as he had done every night for as long as Charlie could recall. It got so you never even heard him any more.

Tomorrow, Charlie thought, I'll be digging for gold. He wondered what Sarah was doing. He wished she could see him now, a real 'forty-niner. A real tenderfoot, he corrected himself with a grin, mindful of the throb of his feet. They had walked nineteen miles that day under a burning sun. He wondered if Sarah thought of him, searching the

brown gullies of California for gold. She would be asleep now, her dark hair spilling across the pillow, her lips slightly parted.

They said that sometimes you found gold just lying there on the ground. It didn't seem likely. This shanty town with its street of sucking mud, and its rough-clad miners buying their supplies with little buckskin sacks of gold dust that was weighed meticulously on brass scales, this was the reality. Charlie had already seen enough of the Mother Lode country to get the edges knocked off his hopes, but deep down he was sure he'd be lucky. He just felt that, strong in his bones. He'd always been a lucky one.

The three of them had come west together, part of a wagon train that had been set up in Kanessville, Iowa, to cross the country into the Oregon Territory. Charlie, Jack McGowan and Laurie Rodgers had taken a ship down to San Francisco, easy enough all the way. There they heard horror stories of men who'd taken seven months to come round the Horn by sea and lost everything they owned in the doing of it. Others came across the Panama isthmus, where they died like flies of the yellowjack.

Everything was just so damned makeshift. San Francisco wasn't much more than a mudhole on the coast. The harbor was thick with the masts of ships which had arrived and then been immediately abandoned. They lay in the sullen water rotting, too valuable to destroy, too big to shift. Nobody wanted the damned things. Walking along the waterfront at the far end of what they were calling Montgomery Street you'd come to a place where there had been a landfall and find ships that had been turned into dosshouses or stores. The figureheads jutted out into the street, the prow of some big schooner right up against a squatting row of clapboard shacks.

They had arrived in San Francisco on September 23rd. By reliable report there were already more than twenty thousand men in the town, the majority of them under forty. There was a constant racket, the ceaseless sounds of excavation, of carpentry, hammering, drilling. There were fleets of drays hauling sand up from the beaches beyond the town and filling in the spaces between the abandoned ships in the harbor. Charlie and his partners

came off their ship at the Long Wharf, the only wharf, come to that. It stuck out a mile into the bay at the foot of the slope below Portsmouth Square. There was no help to hand, no porters, no lackeys, not even a Kanaka. The sailors on board the packet were as anxious to get ashore as the travellers. Charlie saw one of them dive over the side of the ship and strike out towards land through the muddy water, as if the man could not even bear to wait for as long as it took to work his way along the tottering quay.

The Long Wharf was booby-trapped for its entire length with ragged holes torn into the planking where some greenhorn had berthed clumsily or some tyro wincher had dropped a cargo from his nets. All along the wharf paddlesteamers and sailboats lay tied up, deserted. There was even a tall clipper. Nearer to shore there were cheapjack stores trading in secondhand clothes and spoiled food. There were gambling huts packed with Chinese and deadfalls that would have made the ones back at the railhead in Missouri look like New Orleans bagnios by comparison.

The three men made their way up to Portsmouth Square through a stinking, noisy crowd of men who jostled and shouted and pushed as if they were the last ones left alive on an abandoned planet. Slant-eyed Chinese, Mexicans in greasy velvet suits decorated with silver coins, flashily dressed miners who'd struck it rich flaunting their luck in silk hats and fur-collared coats, even in that heat. Drays loaded with barrels, carts loaded with furniture, runways from the saloons sticking out into the streets like the spars of sailing ships, empty packing-cases thrown heedlessly out of stores and houses sticking up from lying abandoned where they had fallen from the wagon carrying them, every imaginable language in the world being spoken simultaneously.

"Damme if I knowed they was this many people in the hull damn world!" Rodgers said, elbowing his way through the crowd. He was a tall, well-built man with dark hair parted in the middle. He looked slender alongside the huge bulk of Jack McGowan. Charlie grinned. He knew no language but his own, although he knew the sound of some of those he was hearing now. Spanish, Portuguese, French.

He wandered behind his two friends in a sort of stunned daze, unable to believe he was truly here, in San Francisco, in California, on his way to make his fortune in the goldfields. He saw Laurie Rodgers give that shrug of his, and followed the two bigger men as they bored through the crowd uphill to Portsmouth Square. It was even more crowded than the waterfront had been. Auctioneers were yelling themselves hoarse trying to sell cargoes from the East which had arrived in greater quantities than the market could absorb. There were mountains of things Charlie could not imagine anyone wanting ever. Why would anyone go to the trouble of shipping two crates of Japanese fans all the way there? Jack said there weren't any women in the town except the Chilean whores.

The fitful wind was full of dust, tossing it into their eyes just when they swore it wouldn't catch them that way another time. Three sides of the square were taken up with saloons and gambling joints. On the fourth side was a big adobe building with buckets hanging from the viga poles. Wonder no one stole them, Charlie thought, with buckets the price they are. A severe-looking man with the fierce eyes of a fanatic yelled at him: the way of the transgressor is hard, the man screeched, his thin voice lost in the strident thump of a brass band that was murdering Strauss in the El Dorado Saloon.

They went in for a "smile," jostling their way through the hordes of men inside until they got near enough to the bar to bang on it. The bartender ignored them until he was good and ready. Everyone called him Professor. The saloon was huge and noisy and extravagantly decorated. There were erotic paintings on the walls above the bar. Charlie had never seen anything like them, and pointed them out to Laurie Rodgers.

"Jumpin' dawgs!" Rodgers exclaimed as he gulped down his beer. "You reckon anyone could *do* that?"

"Be a hell of a lot of fun findin' out," McGowan grinned, throwing back his head. "Yeeee-haw!"

Nobody took any notice of his muleskinners' yell. The brass band was thundering away incessantly at the end of the building. The air was thick and blue with tobacco smoke, the mud-colored sawdust underfoot clotted with

spit and cigar butts. There were gambling tables scattered around the room, men standing four and five deep around them, watching each game intently. In front of the players seated at the tables there were piles of gold coins, dozens of those little sacks of gold dust, heaps of nuggets in varying sizes. Next to the dealer at each table there was a pair of brass scales and neatly stacked weights. There was a constant roar of noise, solid as a big waterfall. Once in a while it was penetrated by the even sharper noise of someone shouting in rage or excitement at the turn of the cards. Charlie looked at himself in the cut-grass mirrors behind the crowded bar. He looked pale and weedy next to the burned, bearded men swigging their liquor next to him.

They talked with dozens of men, trying to get a handle on the best place to start looking. Everyone was taciturn about the location of his own claim, its size. They understood that; if a man located gold, he didn't shoot off his mouth so half the deadbeats in San Francisco could make a beeline up there and jump his claim. They got a few pointers, just the same. Head up towards the Mokelumne River, away from the main strikes, men told them. As good there as anywhere.

Everyone told them stories about the lucky strikes, or about some big stiff who'd made his pile in property or building or merchanting or gambling. They said there were men up at the diggings earning five, ten thousand dollars a day off one sixteen-foot square claim. They said one man had picked up a chunk of gold that weighed thirteen pounds from a river he was wading across. It fetched \$36,000, they said; he found it before breakfast, too, so he still had the rest of the day to make some money. They said there was a little girl up around Angel's Camp who'd found a funny-colored rock and taken it home to her mama, who washed it in her laundry tub and found she was the owner of a seven-pound nugget of pure gold. They said there was a prospector up around Coloma whose mule had dragged its stake at night. When the disgruntled owner awoke next day he found he was shy one mule, but rich from the pocket of gold he found in the hole he'd made with the picket-pin. They said one old man had shot a bear up in the mountains near Auburn. When he clam-

bered down to the ledge on which it had fallen he found the rock richly laced with gold. Just a few weeks back, a greenhorn from New York had staked a claim up on the middlefork of the American, dug down four feet the first day and found gold in huge chunks. They said he took out \$20,000 in four weeks.

There were stories for almost every camp, and the names of the places were like a litany of excitements: Poverty Bar, Angel's Camp, Cuteye Hill, Coyote Diggings, Rough and Ready, Mad Mule Gulch, Gouge Eye. They said the best thing anyone starting out could do was team up with a sailor, or a nigger, or a Dutchman—those were the luckiest at the diggings.

Next morning they went and bought breakfast. They had to pay fifty cents but they got a good feed and McGowan said it was worth it, they didn't know when they'd get a cooked meal again. They'd seen all the sights, so they got out of San Francisco as quickly as they could. It cost a man fifteen dollars to sleep in a cot, and the cheapest room ran to a couple of hundred dollars a month—in gold, and in advance. There wasn't a single building in the town that wasn't infested with every kind of bug and pest that God had put on the face of the earth. Rats as big as cats foraged in the garbage-littered streets; nobody cared. Locals said that the bedbugs were so big they'd been known to drag a drunk off someplace they could bite him to death in private. Apples cost five dollars each, eggs twenty-five dollars a dozen if you could get them. Luckily, they'd brought most of the hardware that they needed with them; one store was selling the cheapest kind of washpan for five dollars, and blankets a Digger Indian would have turned up his nose at went for forty dollars apiece. Boots were a hundred dollars a pair, butcher knives thirty dollars, a quart of whisky at least as much. Two dollars for a pill—any kind of pill, no matter for what originally prescribed—and a hundred if you wanted the advice of a self-proclaimed doctor who dispensed them. They said the cost of a house in San Francisco was a dollar a brick, and there were no bricks. They said a man could pay a pound of gold for a pound of nails and, although it seemed impossible, it was actually true.

"Hit looks to me like the sooner we skedaddle, the better off we'll be," Laurie Rodgers said. "I come here to make money, not spend it."

They went to Happy Valley, about a mile out of town to the south. There were little camps all up and down the beach, and lighters plying through the oily surf bringing in still more passengers from the ships anchored offshore. There was no longer any room to anchor in Yerba Buena Bay.

By seven they were on the march, faces set towards the mountains, spirits buoyed by optimism. The cruel sun climbed up the brassy side of the sky and the temperature rose to near the hundred mark. They didn't talk much after the first hour or so. It was dry, dusty, wearying.

They camped that night on the bank of a small stream and Jack brewed up some hot chocolate. They opened a tin of sardines and softened the stale bread by dipping it into the chocolate. Charlie's legs throbbed and his feet were sore. The next day they set out at sun-up. It was pretty country all around, live oaks and cottonwoods everywhere, alders lining the river banks. Cattle grazed on the hills to the north, and once they saw an eagle soaring disdainfully above the peaks in the distance. The air was pure and clear and smelled of hay, and they had made good time, arriving at Mormon Island just before dusk. Charlie recalled his first impression of the place: it looked like liquid mud. Every square foot of earth as far as the eye could see had been dug over. Some of the claims had rockers on them; one group had a long tom. Below the town the river water had been used and re-used so many times it looked like liquid mud. The place stank: there was a constant hum of insects everywhere.

"No chance of making a cent here," McGowan said. "Ever' damn square foot is staked out."

He was right. The only alternative was to work for day wages on someone else's claim or buy someone out. The day wages were very high, but they weren't tempted. There were more hills beyond these, and beyond them more again; they were going to strike it heavy just as soon as they got properly started in. They decided to walk up to the Dry Diggings, beyond the ridge to the south-east.

"Cricks up thar'll be dry this time of year," McGowan had said. "Come another few weeks and she'll rain, then you'll see color ever' time you swash your pan."

Charlie looked at his friends. McGowan was huddled in his blankets like a sleeping bear. Rodgers was still snoring. The oil in the lamp was getting low. Charlie smiled and unbuckled his money belt. He carefully counted his money in grimy hands. Twenty-seven dollars. We better find gold soon, he thought.

The banks of the river looked like an anthill. Miners swarmed over every available inch of ground, tearing at it with picks and shovels. McGowan and Rodgers were doing the digging on the first shift. Charlie stood thigh deep in the icy water of the river, operating the long tom. They had found a patch of land that looked as if it hadn't been worked over too badly. It was on the Cosumnes, a little way above Fiddletown, a good spot in the elbow of the river where there was a fair chance of getting color. Gold or gold bearing materials generally deposited their treasure in certain kinds of rock formation: upstream of gravel bars, behind boulders, or in ledges or crevices under water.

The tom was pretty makeshift, but it worked. The inclined trough into which Rodgers and McGowan were shovelling the earth and gravel was about eleven feet long. At its lower end was a perforated sheet of steel called a riddle. This rested on a box with wooden bars set across it, the riffle. The gravel was washed down the trough and shaken through the riddle, where the heavier gold particles were caught in the riffles. Hardly anyone was using a washpan any more, except tenderfeet who either didn't know or couldn't afford better. It was just too damned slow and too damned much like hard work. Not that working the tom was what you'd call easy, Charlie thought. Primitive though it was, however, it was a lot more productive.

The brassy sun beat down, burning the sweat off Charlie's back as fast as it broke from his skin. His feet in the

swift icy water of the creek felt like two blocks of stone. His job was to lift the water in buckets and pour it into the trough. He wished they had taken the time to buy a wheel, but the boys said if they left the claim that long then sure as hell some greasers would come along and work it. After every two hours they took a short break. Charlie staggered out of the water and flopped on the scorched grass beside the river. Jack McGowan leaned on his shovel and grinned at Charlie, his honest face furrowed with white streaks where the sweat had runnelled through the dust.

"Je-hosaphat," Charlie said.

"Amen to that," Rodgers replied, and tossed another shovelful of muddy gravel into the trough. It was nearly midday and so far they hadn't even seen color. Yet the day before they had taken out more than two hundred and forty dollars' worth. Charlie wondered whether the claim was playing out and, as if reading his mind, Jack McGowan said the very thing.

"Could be," Laurie Rodgers said, sticking out his lower lip.

They all looked at the river as if it could answer their question. It was muddy brown. Hundreds of men were using the water. Someone had told them that one of the independent companies was putting in a pump and a drag and an Archimedes screw, as well as the existing wheel. Everyone agreed they must be taking plenty of gold out of the ground up there if they could afford that kind of equipment.

"We could move on," Charlie said. He looked at the bare brown-yellow hills. There wasn't a tree worth the name on any of them any more. The trees had all long since gone for fuel or shelter or to make cradles or rockers. Nobody gave a damn about the scenery.

"Hit's no use us movin' along all the time," Laurie said. "We been doin' that a year now, an' we got damned little to show for it."

It was true, Charlie thought. After the best part of a year's backbreaking work each of them had a little over three pounds of dust. The going rate in San Francisco was sixteen dollars an ounce, which made their haul some

dollars over seven hundred and fifty. It was a lot more than a man could make for a year's work back east, but it was a hell of a long way from a fortune. They'd washed out most of what they had in pans. It had been the most grinding work that Charlie had ever done. As Laurie Rodgers had sourly observed, it wasn't that the presence of gold in California had been overrated, it was the amount of work you had to do to get it that had been underrated.

They set to work again, moving slightly upstream, the wet slop of the gravel and mud going into the trough the only sound other than Jack McGowan's steady curses. He attacked the ground as if it had done him a personal injury. He cursed it and the sun and the bugs and the mud and the rheumatic aches in his back. The other two didn't even hear him any more, nor did they really hear the harsh *chuck-chuck* of the shovels, or their own grunts of exertion. By sundown they were completely exhausted. They had stripped about four square yards of ground and washed it through the tom without seeing so much as a glint of gold. Four days later, without another penny to show for all their backbreaking exertions, they abandoned the claim on the Cosumnes and set off across the bare slopes towards Mokelumne Hill. Jack had heard that they were taking plenty out of the ground up there.

The town was built on the top and sides of a hill about two miles up from the river. It was a crowded, bustling place, full of stores and shops on both sides of its L-shaped street. Charlie counted eleven places selling fresh beef; his mouth filled with saliva at the very thought of it. There were half a dozen hotels, and in some of the shops he saw women serving, some of them American, others Mexican.

McGowan had already talked with a man he knew, who directed them down to Big Bar, where there was a damming company. Laurie said he wasn't too keen to team up with strangers, and Charlie agreed, but somehow Jack McGowan had his way and they walked down there. They worked for two weeks with five other men. The first week the company got \$14.56. The second week it was \$672.56, making their total for the fortnight just over a hundred dollars each. They were worse off than if they'd been working alone, so they called an end to the arrangement and

walked back up to the town. There was a lot of talk about the Vigilantes. An Irishman who took six pounds of gold from a drunken miner at Carson's Creek was apprehended in Mokelumne Hill. He had already gambled away half of the dust. They took him back to Carson's Creek and hanged him. The same day someone told Laurie that Henry Fryer, the man who had taken over the claim they had abandoned on the Cosumnes above Fiddletown, had taken out more than six thousand dollars, sold the claim for another thousand, and left for the States.

The next day they went up the Mokelumne and found a bar with some working room. They pounded in their stakes and looked around. There were three Americans, some Mexicans, and three Kanakas working up there already. None of them looked up from their labors for more than a moment as the newcomers moved in, and Charlie knew why. Some Americans finding greasers or niggers working claims would run them off, maybe even kill them.

The bar was just a level space where the river recoiled from a dry arroyo. In the rainy season it would be a roaring torrent. The ground was hard and rocky, with no loose sand except that which had wedged between rocks and boulders. The whole area was about four acres, and a good deal of it had already been prospected. There were holes slanting down to bedrock between the broken strata of slate.

"I'm beginnin' to think they ain't no undug land left in Californy," Rodgers said as they stood, hands on hips, looking at the prospect.

"Listen," McGowan said. "Let's do some thinkin' afore we do any more diggin'."

"What's on your mind, Jack?" Charlie asked.

"I'm lookin' at that there river, wonderin' if'n we just couldn't maybe divert her some."

"Divert the river? What'd that do?" Laurie said. "Apart from gettin' them other fellers up there plumb riled?"

McGowan answered by picking up a stick and drawing a diagram in the sand. The river curled away from where they were standing, he pointed out, like the other curve of a D. If they dug a canal to let the river into the arroyo, it would wash through and save them endless hours of back-

breaking toil building a flume to get the water over, or worse, carrying it bucketful by bucketful across the stony ground.

"Damned if that mightn't work, Jack," Laurie said.

"Then let's get at it," Charlie agreed.

They swung their shovels enthusiastically for the first time in many weeks, making the earth fly. The Kanakas watched them in insolent amazement. When they had the channel marked out and about halfway dug one of the Americans came over and stood watching them. He was dressed in greasy moleskin pants and a filthy check shirt. He looked like a Pike.

"What you boys got in mind here?" he asked.

McGowan told him and the man's face turned ugly.

"You cain't just waltz in hyar and steal our water!" he said. His two companions had stopped work and were standing at the ready; Charlie felt cold fingers of dread touching his spine. He had never fought anyone in his life.

"If you're a-fixin' to try stoppin' us, you better go get some help," McGowan said to the stranger, cool as trout belly. He wrapped a calloused hand around the walnut butt of the big Starr & Adams revolver stuck in the belt of his pants. The man looked at the gun and then at McGowan and then at Charlie and Laurie. He nodded as though he was coming to some kind of decision.

"I ain't lookin' for no war," he said. He held his hands up palm forward and backed away. "No hard feelin's."

"No hard feelin's," McGowan replied, iron still there in his voice. "You just vamoose."

The man retreated rapidly and they did not see him or his companions any more until the end of the day. As they quit work at sundown Charlie thought he saw them heading into the scrub fringing the arroyo about a mile further north. Somehow the sight of them made him uneasy, but he said nothing to Jack or Laurie. They gathered up their tools and pitched the tent. Laurie lit a fire and Jack opened up a can of oysters that they'd been saving. They made good soup.

"I thought they was for a special occasion," Laurie grinned. His was the lightest heart of the trio. He could always find a way to make them smile.

"It is a special occasion," Jack said. "I'm hungry."

They ate the soup with relish, and then chewed on some hard-tack they had bought in Mokelumne Hill. Charlie dived into his pack and brought out three apples he had bought. They were dried and wrinkled, but they were still sweet. Their spirits rose. Jack said there was a good chance they could take as much as four or five ounces a day out of the arroyo if there was any color there at all.

They stood their boots outside to dry and wriggled into the tent in their muddy clothes. We all smell like Diggers, Charlie thought. His eyes were already heavy with fatigue. There was a lingering, nagging ache in his bones, like a toothache that hasn't decided to come full on yet. His wrists and elbows felt as if someone had caulked the joints with treacle that throbbed.

He started to doze; somewhere a stick cracked. He didn't react for a moment, and then all at once he realized what it was and leaped to his feet as the men came in swinging clubs. One of them hit Rodgers hard on the forehead and Charlie saw him go backwards, bright blood dappling his face and beard. McGowan roared like an angry bear and the man who was trying to pinion his arms went spinning away in a thrashing heap. Then McGowan caught hold of the man who had hit Rodgers and there was an awful sound, like a butcher's cleaver hitting bone, as Jack's enormous paw smashed into the man's face. Charlie fended off the attack of a thin, dark man with a stringy beard who tried to kick his feet away from under him. He found he had a knife in his hand without recalling having pulled it from its sheath. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion as if they were under water. He felt detached, cocooned from the violence around him. The man skipped back with a terrible panic showing on his wasted face when he saw the knife. Charlie felt a surge of strength, confidence—the bastard was yellow. He went after the thin man with the knife cocked in his hand the way he'd seen them do it on the plains, and the man skipped back again and then turned and ran.

McGowan stood looking down at the man he had felled. The man was trying to get to his knees, making broken sounds through his mashed face. McGowan kicked him

between the legs and the man screamed and fell forward, rolling on the baked ground.

"Git!" McGowan roared, and kicked the man again. The man pitched forward in a sort of dive, face down in the wicked gravel. He screamed again as Jack came after him, scrambling to his feet.

"Git, you bastard!" McGowan shouted, and the man blundered down the slope, caroming off a tree. There was only the one left now, the Pike. He was looking at McGowan with wide eyes, rooted to the spot with fear. Jack was alongside him in one mighty jump, clamping his shirt into a bunched paw.

"Thief!" Jack shouted. His voice smacked back flat off the cliffs up the river. His hand came around his body with a knife in it.

"No!" the Pike screeched. "I didn't mean—!" He fell slightly away from McGowan and then screamed again when he saw his ear in the big man's hand. The side of his head was all bloody. Good God, Charlie thought, Jack's cut off his ear. He could see it and yet he couldn't really believe it.

"Thief!" McGowan shouted for the second time, and reached for the man's other ear. The man pulled a small pistol out of his pocket and there was a muffled report. McGowan frowned, as though a wasp had stung him. He looked annoyed and he looked puzzled and then he slid slowly to the ground, and the man without an ear looked at Charlie Malone. Charlie ran at him, snatching up the hatchet as the man raised the pistol again. Charlie threw the hatchet without thinking about it. It hit the man in the center of his forehead and knocked him backwards. He rolled over, blood pouring down his face, scrabbling for the pistol. Charlie looked at the man and then at the pistol. There was nothing he could do. The man got hold of the pistol and grinned evilly as he lined the barrel up on Charlie. He's going to kill me, Charlie thought, imagine that. Then Laurie Rodgers fired the big Starr revolver and the man with the pistol fell back, his skull opening like a flower in front of Charlie's horrified eyes. Charlie sank to his knees and vomited in the dirt. The air stank of cordite and death.

"Jack?" Laurie was saying. "Jack?"

Charlie looked towards his companion with agonized eyes. He knew McGowan was dead without knowing how he knew it. It wasn't going to make any difference how long Laurie Rodgers shook Jack's shoulder and slapped his face. The big man was dead and that was the end of everything.

The very next day they struck gold.

Charlie had wanted to leave right away, quit the clearing which would always stink of death for him now. Laurie Rodgers talked him out of it. He'd spoken to some other miners, told them what had happened. He said that if they quit now the miners would assume that the killings had been murder, and they would be outcasts. The fact that Jack McGowan had cut off one of the intruders' ears had been the clincher, he said. It was the standard punishment for thieves, universally recognized. No miner would tolerate the presence of a cut-ear.

Charlie and his friend went back up to Mokelumne Hill and saw Judge George H. Campbell. He was portly, florid, affable and sympathetic. He told them they had done the right thing and praised them for coming in. By the time they were ready to leave he had enrolled them in the Vigilance Committee.

"We need men like you two," he said. "Men who aren't afraid to do what has to be done. The sonsofbitches! Only thing they rightly understand is a rope or a bullet or the lash."

Next day Charlie and Laurie went back to the sandbar and the second shovelful they washed had the solid glitter of gold in it. The same bloodracing excitement consumed Charlie again, just as it had the very first time he'd turned over a boulder on the south fork of the American and seen the dull glint of the nuggets nestling in the soft, clear

water. He felt as if he wanted to scream, and his muscles fluttered and his heart pounded as if he had been running uphill. His mouth was desert dry as he called Laurie across, careful to keep his voice low.

"Laurie," he said. "Come here now."

Laurie came over and looked at what Charlie had in his hands. "Jesus, Charlie," he said reverently.

They worked feverishly for the rest of the day. When they weighed it out that night they had just over eighteen ounces of gold: nearly three hundred dollars for a day's work. They sat in the tent and poured it from the scales into little rawhide sacks. The trickling gold dust caught the light of the lamp and glinted like a devil's eyes.

"If only it holds out," Rodgers breathed, scarcely daring to think what the claim would be worth if that find wasn't just a quick "flash" in the pan. In ten days, fifteen hundred. In twenty, three thousand; you couldn't imagine it.

They worked on the sandbar for another eight weeks. By the time they had dug and washed every foot of earth that looked as if it might conceivably be paydirt, they had carved another seventy-two ounces of gold out of the earth. With what they already had, it was nearly nine pounds of gold, eleven hundred and fifty dollars' worth each. Deducting the cost of getting to California, food, equipment and all the rest, it wasn't much of a profit. Charlie thought back on the year past, the backbreaking work from dawn to sunset, the leeching sun, the endless diet of fatty pork, the squalor and discomfort, the rats, the fleas, the snakes, the poison plants, the ever-present stink of ordure. The death of Jack McGowan. He told Laurie that he was calling it quits.

"If this is El Dorado, Laurie, I'll take Philadelphia," he said.

"Listen, Charlie, maybe we ain't struck it real heavy," Laurie said. "But by God, Charlie, we got more'n a thousand dollars each. You realize what a man could buy with that much money in Kanesville? A house, maybe, some good land to go with it. Men working for him."

"I got no hankerin' to be a farmer," Charlie said. "I tried that once. Never again."

"Well, what the hell else can you do?"

"I seen enough up here to know the only real way to make money is to have something these men want. Equipment. Food. Entertainment. They'll pay the prices, no matter what they are."

"Well," Laurie grinned. "I wouldn't be surprised if you couldn't buy yourself a string o' fillies for a thousand dollars. Chileno gals, or Chinese straight off the boat."

"I'm not a pimp," Charlie said, "nor yet a nigger minstrel. But I don't reckon I'm no ground squirrel, neither. I'm through burrowin' in the dirt. I'm going on down to Sacramento, Laurie, San Francisco maybe. See what I can scare up for a thousand dollars. A store, maybe."

"A store?" Laurie said with infinite disgust. "You done tried that, Charlie. Me too. That ain't no kind of life at all."

"Neither is this," Charlie said bleakly.

Laurie just sat looking at him blankly and Charlie knew he wasn't getting through to his partner. Laurie didn't mind the heat and the dirt and the toil, or even the danger. It was all a game. Even the gold was a game. Finding it was what was important, not having it. What Laurie was after was adventure. He remembered him back in Kanesville, telling tall stories to wide-eyed farm girls on Saturday nights. Laurie was just storing up some more good stories to tell the girls back home. If the day ever came when he made the trip, doubtless he'd have some good ones.

"What will you do?" he asked Rodgers.

"Shee-hit, I can do some more prospectin'," Laurie said. "I hear tell how they're takin' plenty out o' the ground around Angel's Camp. Maybe I'll mosey on down there. Some feller come by yesterday said they was pickin' up nuggets weighin' eighteen, twenty ounces with the point of a Bowie knife."

"He show you any?"

"Hell, no!" Laurie said. "He hadn't been down there hisself. Just heard it from some other feller who'd come up from down them parts."

"Sure," Charlie said. "And he can teach pigs to play the flute."

"Well," Rodgers said, looking sheepish. Then: "Listen, Charlie. If you go, I can't afford to buy you out. The tools and stuff."

You could buy me out, Charlie thought. He didn't say it, though. If it hadn't been for Laurie he'd have been dead by now.

"Owe it to me," he said. "Your credit's good with me, Laurie."

Next evening they meticulously weighed out the dust into equal portions. Seventy-two ounces of dirt, Charlie thought, that's all it is. He thought of big Jack McGowan lying in the shallow grave they'd dug on the hill, beneath the tall California pine with the white orchard blossoms gone wild along its boughs.

"Listen, Laurie," he said. "Maybe we ought to send something back for Jack's family?"

"Charlie." Laurie said patiently, "you're a good feller, but you're a soft touch. One day it'll be the ruin of you. Now tell me this—what the hell use would it be us sending gold back to that worthless passel of whiners in Iowa? Go on, tell me!"

"Well . . . his wife. . .," Charlie said.

"Shee-hit, Charlie, why you think Jack come west if'n it wasn't to get the hell away from her?"

Did I do that, too? Charlie thought. Is that why I came, and never even realized it?

"You figure Jack would've sent money back east was he still alive?" Rodgers insisted.

"I guess not," Charlie said reluctantly. Rodgers was probably right and he'd known Jack much better. "I guess he wouldn't."

"Damn right," Rodgers said. "He'd've wanted us to have anything that was his. Just the same as we'd've wanted him to have our foofarraw if one of us had got kilt."

"I expect you're right," Charlie said, not believing it.

"Sure I am," Laurie said. "Sure as hell."

He was asleep in five minutes, snoring loudly. Charlie, just as tired, found that sleep would not come. He was bothered by the thought that had occurred to him. Had he run away from Sarah? Now that they were thousands

of miles apart, did he truly want her with him again? Would it be easier, kinder, to cut the ties painlessly now, after their long separation? Would she care a damn if he did? He could not bring himself to think of another man possessing Sarah, touching her body. Yet he was not sure that he loved her or wanted her himself. God damn it all to hell, he thought. He sat in the dark tent and listened to the purling swirl of the river. Downstream he could hear someone playing a harmonica, the jaunty strains of "Yankee Doodle." There was a huge roar of male laughter, and then the night silence closed in again. The wind sighed in the trees. The stars were bright and clear. The future was faceless, the past a dream. Nobody cares about anybody, Charlie thought. He wondered if he would ever see Sarah again, and whether it mattered a damn, anyway.

Ezra had been right, as usual, Theo thought. Building up the business in California had been anything but easy; but he had done it. He did it without realizing what the cost would be, and by the time he had achieved what he wanted it didn't matter anyway. He set out simply to become dominant in his own field, the best, working on that old precept again: it took just as much time to do it wrong as it did to do it right. He learned every trick there was to learn, and then invented a few new ones of his own. How to gauge seasonal demands by pumping people who were getting mail from the East—mail got to California months before the immigrants of whom the letters spoke were even in the mountains. How to ensure that Ezra shipped the priority goods that this information indicated would be needed. How to keep an ear cocked in San Francisco warehouses without seeming to listen, so that he was always one up on trade gossip. He was big and bluff and he knew a lot of people. He did not think of any of them as friends.

What he learned he used for his own benefit. He did not realize that others were awed by his determination, surprised by his inventiveness, discomfited by his ability. Theo had always credited his peers with as much if not more intelligence and ability than himself. He was surprised when they shied away from his methods, stunned when he realized that the pace he was setting was too brisk.

All they wanted was enough. Enough, when there was a world waiting to be taken!

He got to know, and cultivated, the men who not only survived his tactics but matched them. Collis Huntington, the young man he had met in Panama, was now in business up in Sacramento in partnership with a Michigan-born man named Mark Hopkins, and Theo stayed on the friendly side of the pair. He also got to know Henry Meiggs and his cronies in San Francisco, as well as the Gwins and the McAllisters. These were the movers and shakers. Theo did them all small favors, giving them information which was of no value to himself but might be to them. They were grateful and reciprocated. By the end of 1850 Theodore Carver & Co. was a well-founded and thriving business firm.

Time and again Theo trudged up to Echo Summit to meet wagon trains on their way down to Sacramento and listen, and learn, and learn, and listen. He wrote long letters to Ezra outlining his plans for the Carver stores. He had a site in San Francisco picked out, he told Ezra, a good spot on the growing side of the city at the southern end of Kearney Street. He had plans to offer farmers credit notes against their future crops once they were settled. With the credit they would be able to buy goods at Carver & Co.'s stores, paying interest on loans when the crops came in. If they could not repay the loans, Theo would mortgage their farms; then, armed with the deeds to the land, he would be able to raise yet further capital to expand the business—in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and so on. There were a lot of other ideas to be explored, he wrote. The hotel business was going to boom, not just in San Francisco, either. He was talking to a young banker he knew, a fellow named Bill Ralston, who had some very interesting ideas in that direction. There were real-estate deals he could get into, and he was talking to politicians and railroad boomers, too. "I am learning something from all of them," he wrote, "although I doubt very much that any of them learns a great deal from me."

He smiled as he reread the sentence. It spoke volumes about the change in himself, he thought. He was no longer the young tenderfoot who had clambered off the *Alexander*

Hamilton. He was established in Sacramento, strong and getting stronger.

The following day, while a biting north wind screamed through the streets, the city became an inferno. Fire-alarm bells brought the citizens tumbling into the streets to see arching spears of flame leaping from roof to tinder-dry roof along J and K Street. The fire seemed like a huge, sentient thing as it roared out of gaping windows, the tongues of flame licking towards untouched buildings nearby. Flickering brands and sparks that glowed like fireflies even in the daylight lifted on the rising hot air and then tumbled to find purchase and new life on buildings up the street. Embers started new fires in the bundles of merchandise that storekeepers were dragging out on to the street for safety. People were rushing down to the levee, wading out until they were hip deep in the muddy water of the American to escape the furious blast of the fire. Drays thundered up and down J Street, their soot-grimed drivers yelling that they would take a load down to the safety of the levee for fifty dollars. Merchants staggered in and out of their premises, carrying, dragging, pulling whatever they could move, while others beat helplessly at the contemptuous flames.

In his new building Theo and two of his clerks flailed wildly at the fire with wet sacks and blankets. The flames were like darting swordsmen, retreating and then lunging forward from the rear storeroom in which they had first taken hold. Now the entire roof was ablaze. One of the clerks screeched as his jacket started to smolder on his back. Theo smothered the smoking cloth with his sack, and hustled the boy out on to the street. The youngster stumbled and fell prostrate, sobbing, exhausted. Theo looked at his store with agonized eyes: it was already impossible to get back in. The second clerk came out, pawing at eyes blinded by choking smoke. There was no way the building could be saved, no way the flames could be stopped. The back counter was already ablaze, and even as Theo watched the big coffee grinder fell apart and lurched over, making an iron clatter that could just be heard above the thunderous roar of flames. The wooden floorboards were already starting to burn, and the hot

breath of the fire reached out to where Theo stood in the street, as if trying to pull him back inside. He watched with empty eyes as the flames consumed his hopes, his plans, his ambitions; cursing the indifferent flames until finally the roof caved in, and he was dragged away from the smoldering ruins by Philander Hunt, who had come up from the levee to look for him.

Theo turned his back on the grave of his dreams and walked dumbly alongside Philander Hunt to the Embarcadero. He could not cry; there was no moisture left in his seared eyes. After a while he realized that his hands were badly burned. It didn't seem to matter much at all.

Within days Sacramento was back in business. Merchants who had managed to salvage or save some of their stocks erected tents or canvas-roofed shanties on the sites of their former premises and started selling again. There was a good deal of bartering, for three out of every four businessmen in the city had been burned out. Young Brigham, who had run a small drygoods place a few yards along from Theo's store, had been burned to death in his own bedroom. Ironically, a white-brick store and warehouse standing not ten yards from the charcoal remnants of Theo's building had not been touched by the flames. He wrote to Ezra and told him the bad news as soon as his hands were healed.

"Do what you can alone, Theo," Ezra wrote back. "Look about you for someone with enough money to re-establish the store, even if it means offering some form of partnership. In this event you will, of course, endeavor to obtain a *dominant* position. Let us try to get through this rough water."

Easy enough for Ezra to write, Theo said to Philander Hunt that night at the Pomona House. Where was he going to find someone with money to invest in a sunk business at this time in Sacramento?

"Charlie Malone," Phil said all of a sudden.

"Who?"

"Charlie Malone," Hunt repeated. "A young fellow, Theo, just the right sort. He was up in the diggings for a year or so, then he tried to set up in San Francisco but got

burned out. He put what he had left into a small operation, taking orders for goods from the miners and then bringing them back from San Francisco. Sort of commission agent. He—Theo, what the devil did I say? Why are you looking like that?"

"Charlie Malone," Theo said. "Is that his name?"

"Aye," Phil Hunt said. "But Theo—what did I say?"

"Phil," Theo said, "I think you may have just made me a rich man!"

"Eh?" said Philander Hunt, scratching his head.

Charlie Malone turned out to be a wiry young fellow with a dark beard and hair, his face always on the edge of a ready smile as if he was eager, or even anxious, to please. He was much younger than Theo had expected, but then everybody in California always was: one forgot that half of the population was under the age of twenty-five. The plan which had blossomed, fully-grown, in Theo's mind that evening in the Pomona House was absolutely fitted to the kind of experience that Malone had, and it was so simple as to be foolproof. Yet, Theo knew, it was something that could make Carver & Co. the biggest mercantile enterprise in California, and make it happen tomorrow instead of one day in the nebulous future.

It was simple: there was Malone, known to all the miners as honest, a man possessed of invaluable information about what was needed in the diggings, and even more important what was not. If one knew—and with a partner constantly travelling in the gold fields one would always know—what to order, then wastage would be cut to nil. There would be no loss lines, no goods bought that lost their total value in transit. In addition, the firm could accept orders from the miners on a firm, cash in hand basis, and guarantee delivery that was not only sure but swift. They would flock to buy from a firm that could promise them what they wanted in half the usual time. It could mean the most enormous success, and Theo said as much to Charlie Malone at their first meeting. Charlie was not so sure.

"I had it in mind to set up again on my own, some time," he said reluctantly. "In San Francisco, maybe."

"You'd be doing that with me," Theo said.

"I'm not much of a one for partnerships," Charlie said.

"You'd find it hard going alone," Theo said. "Have you any idea what a town lot costs in San Francisco?"

"Aye," Charlie said with a rueful smile. "And I ain't got it."

"You have about two and a half thousand in cash, you said?"

"Dust," Charlie said. "I had a little luck at the tables."

"You must be one of the very few who have," Theo observed. "You say you also have a wagon and team?"

"That's right."

"You know I'm strapped for cash right now, or I wouldn't even be considering partnership at all?"

"I know it," Charlie said. "I read you lost thirty-five thousand in the fire."

"Like all newspapers they erred on the side of fiction," Theo said. "It was more like twenty-five thousand."

"It's enough," Charlie said, "whatever the sum was. Now tell me why a man who put together a twenty-five thousand dollar business in a couple of years wants to take in a partner who's only got a couple of thousand?"

"More than that," Theo said. "I'd expect you to work for a year at no salary."

"Would you, now?" Charlie grinned. "And what would I live on?"

"There'd be profits each quarter," Theo said.

"You sound very sure."

"I am," Theo said. "I'm very good at what I do."

"So I've heard," Charlie said. "They speak highly of you around here. They don't like you much."

"I don't want to be popular. I don't want to be one of the boys in the Stinking Tent. It's money I'm interested in."

"In that, we're alike," Charlie grinned.

"Nothing else?"

"I doubt it."

"Let me tell you the rest," Theo said. "I've got something more than a thousand plus the stock I managed to salvage from the store before it was burned. Say another two thousand's worth. With what you've got, I could set up

again. Say fifteen hundred dollars for a building and the first quarter's rent on the lot. I've also got my eye on a site in San Francisco but that might have to wait a little now. Come in with me, and you can have a third of the business now. Two years from now it'll be bigger than it was before it burned. I've done it before. I can do it again. I'll do it better this time, because I won't be making the mistakes I made last time."

"No salary for a year, you say?"

"No, not for you or for me, either," Theo said. "At the end of the year we share the profits."

"Who's the other third belong to?"

"My brother Ezra," Theo said.

"Well," Charlie Malone mused. Theo said nothing, just waited while Charlie made up his mind. He was sure Charlie was going to accept, because Charlie would have been embarrassed to take up all this time for nothing. There was something else he wanted, though, and he hadn't got up the nerve to bring it out yet.

"I was thinking of bringing my wife out here," Charlie said after a long silence.

"I didn't even know you were married," Theo said.

"Oh, yes," Charlie said. "Her name is Sarah. She's back home. In Iowa."

"You would bring her out here?"

"I'd thought of it, yes," Charlie said, his eyes far away. He realized as he spoke that he had no idea whether Sarah would come even if he sent for her. He had not written to her for two or three months—he couldn't remember when.

"On two or three thousand dollars?" Theo said. "That's a bit on the optimistic side, isn't it?"

"As to that," Charlie said. "I'm a bit on the optimistic side myself."

"It's no bad thing to be," Theo said. "But you'd be travelling, maybe as much as seven or eight months in the year . . . you know that?"

"Sure."

"Wouldn't it be more realistic to wait awhile, see how things work out? At the end of the year we can review the partnership. Renew it on different terms, with a salary for both of us if it works out well. You can bring your

wife—Sarah?—out here then. The partnership can pay her fare."

"Well," said Charlie again. He was still reluctant to abandon his independence, even though he had always known that setting up alone in San Francisco was a pipe-dream. Just the same, putting his John Hancock on articles of partnership, even with someone who looked and sounded as confident as this burly Bostonian, was a big step. New chances cropped up in California as fast as soapweed, and a man didn't want to be tied down to one thing, one place. Anything could happen in a year, Charlie thought, deciding on the instant to sign the partnership without actually committing himself to it fully. He could always walk out if something better came along, he told himself.

"All right," he said. "I'll go in with you, Carver."

"Theo," Theo said, pumping Charlie's hand and grinning from ear to ear. "Call me Theo."

"All right," Charlie said. "Theo."

"We'll do well, Charlie," Theo said. "You just wait and see."

"You really believe it, don't you? You really think there's going to be a boom out here."

"I know it," Theo said. "People will still be coming out here in their thousands twenty years from now, mark my words. That's why I want to get started, open up in San Francisco. That's where it will all happen. And that's where we've got to be, Charlie!"

His confidence swept Charlie's doubts away momentarily, and Charlie looked at his new partner with fresh respect. Theodore Carver, he decided, was the kind of man who could sell a banker on the idea of building a bridge across the Pacific.

They went down to Front Street and saw Philander Hunt's lawyer, Laurie James. He was a sober-faced man in clerical gray who shared a tiny wooden office with seven other attorneys. After the papers were signed, countersigned and witnessed they came out into the bright sunshine, smiling like grandmothers at a christening. Theo suggested that it would be a good idea if he and Charlie

went straight up to J Street and organized the lumber for their new store.

"Good idea," Charlie agreed. "Shall we go in my wagon?"

"You mean *our* wagon, partner," Theo said.

Charlie looked at him for a long moment and then they both started laughing. They were still laughing as Charlie shouted at the mules to move them up. Philander Hunt watched them go up the street and nodded, pleased with himself. It looked as if it might be a bright new year after all.

In June 1852, with Charlie off somewhere in the mountains below Echo Summit and a new manager installed in the Sacramento store, Theo supervised the shipment of all his belongings down to the new building in San Francisco. It was an imposing brick edifice on the corner of Kearney Street, one of the handsomest in that part of the city. It had cost over \$12,000, but Theo considered it money more than well spent. The lower floor housed the store. The upper story contained a study and a bedroom for Theo, a kitchen and two other rooms to be used as a dormitory by the staff, or by visiting customers down from the mountains. There was a spare room for Charlie. The front of the building was dominated by a sign that read "Carver Bros. & Malone, Merchants," and there was a wooden railing at the front of the flat roof before the windows of the upper story where the clerks could sit and eat their lunch above the dust of the street.

San Francisco had grown. There were solid stone buildings everywhere and the sandy hills to the south of town were already dotted with residences. Market Street, on which the new store stood, was already taking shape, and there was talk of extending Montgomery Street even further south, if permission could be obtained from the Catholic church, which owned the land. A great deal of what had been the harbor when Theo first arrived had now been filled with sand excavated from building lots. Montgomery

Street was some distance away from the waterfront now, and houses straggled up the hills behind the old plaza.

Theo plunged into his work as if it were water, anxious always to do more, revelling in the eighteen-hour day he worked every day of the week. He began investing in city properties and real-estate, watching the biggest of all the San Francisco speculators, "Honest Harry" Meiggs, with cold care. Meiggs was a former Brooklyn councilman with a dashing combination of political savvy, business bravado and professed civic pride. He had built up a small empire within a few years of arriving in San Francisco, not bad for a New York slum kid who had landed penniless in California. "Honest Harry" owned his own wharf at the foot of Powell Street, a two-thousand-feet long construction at which Meiggs's own ships unloaded Meiggs's own timber from Meiggs's own sawmills in Mendocino. He had a handsome house on Telegraph Hill, and he was currently booming the North Beach area for massive residential growth. Plenty of people Theo knew were putting their money into Meiggs's scheme, but Theo wasn't one of them. He had Meiggs down as a mountebank and a crook, along with Meiggs's partner, Rudolph Herold. Theo did not care whether Meiggs founded and supported another twenty San Francisco Philharmonic Societies, he was convinced the man was bad. He found himself dealing against the bluff New Yorker, buying up town lots that Meiggs's collaborators were selling to get in on the North Beach scheme. He told no one what he was doing, not even Charlie.

Theo's affairs soon demanded the attention of an attorney financial adviser. He hired the best there was, a young and enthusiastic lawyer named Hall McAllister. Through him he began to meet the upper social circle of San Francisco society, a pleasure he would gladly have forgone but grimly endured. A man had to do what a man had to do, he said, smiling to himself. One evening he was invited to a party at McAllister's fashionable Stockton Street house, and Hall met him at the door, beaming.

"Theo!" he exclaimed. "I've been waiting for you, my dear fellow. You'll never guess who's here!"

"Then tell me," Theo said.

"Your hero, General Frémont!" Hall said, his face that of a boy who has just successfully accomplished a feat of magic. Theo felt his heart go bump; it seemed incredible that he should at last meet his youthful idol, and as they walked towards the library he reflected wryly on the unexpected way that ambitions sometimes realized themselves without any help from you whatsoever. To his surprise, he found that the general's wife was also present.

"We have met before, Mrs. Frémont," he said. "Well . . almost."

"Almost, Mr. Carver?" Jessie Frémont said, surprise in her voice. She was dressed in a striking dark-blue dress, and her hair was pulled back into a chignon. The dark eyes were dancing with life and interest in everything around her. Every other woman in the room seemed like a ghost alongside her.

"I'd be obliged if you could explain how one almost meets someone, Mr. Carver," she said, her head cocked to one side like an inquisitive bird.

"Oranges, ma'am," Theo said. "Oranges."

He told her the story of the oranges that he had bought for her in Panama City all those years ago, and when he had finished Jessie Frémont's lovely dark eyes were misty. She rose swiftly from her chair and kissed Theo on the cheek. He had still not recovered from the surprise and delight of the experience when General Frémont bounded to his feet and, grasping Theo's hand, began pumping at it as if he intended to shake it off.

"I've always wanted to meet the man who extended that kindness to my wife!" he enthused. "I knew he'd be a gentleman. I'm even more delighted to discover he's a Californian to boot!" He clapped Theo on the back and led him into the drawing-room, calling out for attention until everyone was listening to him. Frémont was not a big man, but he was upright and of striking appearance. The hubbub of conversation ceased, and with everyone's attention riveted upon him the Governor of California proceeded to tell—with embellishments—the story of Theo and the oranges.

With the imprimatur not only of the McAllisters but now of the Frémonts on him, Theo became a regular

visitor at the fashionable homes of the Southern aristocrats in South Park.

There were days when Theo found himself surprised slightly by the change in his fortunes, but he was not the kind of man to dwell on how it had all come about. He was too busy thinking of ways to reach his next objective.

In the latter part of September Charlie Malone came down from the mountains, burned mahogany-brown by the fierce San Joaquin valley sun. He ate an enormous meal and then slept for a solid thirty hours in the little room behind Theo's, snoring until it seemed that the roof was reverberating. At about four the next afternoon he came down to the store, eyes pouched from the sleeping, his face a pasty white where he had scraped off his whiskers.

"Well, Theo," he said. "Our year is about up."

"Just about, Charlie," Theo agreed.

"And how do we stand?"

"I had Hall draw up the figures," Theo said. "Come on into the office and look them over."

"No need of that," Charlie said, pulling a face. Figures weren't his pleasure. "Just tell me how we stand. I've never had any reason to mistrust you, Theo."

"We've had a good year," Theo said. "We turned over maybe half a million dollars in trade. Five hundred and forty-eight thousand and something."

"That much?" Charlie said, with a whistle between the teeth.

"So your share of the profits is about eighteen thousand, give or take a few—"

"How much?" Charlie said. He sat down weakly on a wooden stool by the counter. A man buying some rope looked at him the way someone will look at a drunk.

"Eighteen thous—"

"—and, I heard you," Charlie said. "Christ!" He could not imagine that much money. Nobody in the history of the world had ever had so much, certainly no Malone or anyone any Malone had ever known. Eighteen thousand dollars.

"Theo," he said. "Do you think I could draw some of my share?"

"Of course," Theo said. He was still grinning at Charlie's reaction to the news. He was pleased and happy that his partner was so impressed. He had felt much the same when Hall showed him the final balances for the first time. He had known that they had worked hard, much harder than most. What he hadn't realized was how fast and how big the firm had grown in so short a time. And on top of that there were his shares in Carver Shipping, not to mention the properties that he now owned. There were a fair number of those, including one or two places that would have made his South Park acquaintances throw up their hands in scandalized horror to hear that he possessed them. Humbug, Theo termed it. He had decided when he got up off his back in Sacramento that he would go all out for money, nothing else. Once you had it, the way you had acquired it became less and less important. Once you were strong nobody asked you how you'd got that way, they just assumed you had always been. So today he was Theodore Carver, solid, respectable and wealthy. And so, he reflected with a grin, was Charlie, who was having some trouble assimilating the fact.

"How much do you need?" he asked his partner.

"I was thinking," Charlie said hesitantly. "You think I could have . . . well . . . maybe two hundred and fifty dollars?" He said it all in a rush, as if afraid he would be stopped before he got all the words out. Theo threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"I thought you were going to ask for two thousand!" he said.

"I can't believe there is that much."

"There is," Theo assured him. "Now—how do you feel about renewing the partnership?"

"Get Hall to draw up the papers," Charlie said. "I want to sign them before you have a chance to change your mind."

"Don't worry about that," Theo said. "We've been lucky for each other, Charlie. If you're happy, so am I."

"Then I'll send for Sarah," Charlie said.

"Who?"

"Sarah. My wife."

"Good God, Charlie, I'd forgotten all about her," Theo

said. He slapped Charlie on the back. "Of course, send for her. Send for her as soon as you like!"

"You think we can find a place for her here in the store?" Charlie asked, a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Of course we can," Theo said, thinking Charlie meant somewhere for his wife to sleep, a temporary thing.

"That's good," Charlie said. "She'll need something to do all day while I'm on the road. Sure, she'll be a big help here, Theo. In lots of ways. She's bright, is Sarah. She'll pick the business up in no time."

"You want her to work in the store?"

"Aye," Charlie said, looking up as if surprised at Theo's question. "What else?"

"Well. . . ." Theo dubiously. "If that's what you want, Charlie. If that's what she wants?"

"Sure it will be," Charlie said. "You wait and see. Meanwhile, you get that new agreement drawn up. I'm going over to the Bella Union to see if I can drink them dry."

He stuck the money Theo had laid on the counter into his pants pocket. It made a sizeable bulge.

"Charlie," Theo said. "You're asking for trouble. There are plenty of men on the streets who would cut your throat for that much money."

"Ah, Theo," Charlie said, making a derisory gesture, "you worry too much!"

Then he was out of the door and gone, his wiry form lost in the press of men thronging the sidewalk on Kearney Street. Theo shook his head, smiling. Charlie would never change. He was what Theo's father would have called feckless. He wondered what Sarah Malone would be like. A meek and undemanding mouse, he decided. Anyone married to Charlie Malone was bound to be. Even so, it would be rather nice to have a woman about the place.

For Sarah Malone, who had never been more than a hundred miles away from home, the journey to San Francisco was an adventure of proportions she could not begin to describe. Everything thrilled her, every mile of the way was exciting, and there was no part of the journey which did not in some way interest her. Sudden glints of sun on

gray sea, the long, wheeling swoops and angled turns of gulls and albatrosses, dolphins running ahead of the ship—she watched them endlessly, fascinated, overflowing with new emotions. The rampant luxury of the jungle foliage, the piercing shrieks of the birds and animals unseen in the gloom-shadowed trees, the long, lithe strokes of the oarsmen pushing the *bongos* upriver all delighted her. She drank in sight and sound and smell and gave no thought at all to the discomforts of which the other travellers endlessly complained. The first sight of the new city which was to be her home took away her breath: she had never seen anything remotely like it.

From the water's edge the houses ran higgledy-piggledy in uphill rows and along the sides of the hill, often appearing to be piled on top of each other. The cuts where the streets ran through the hills were raw and knife-edged, as though they had been made by a giant with a spade. There was an enormous clamor of noise, bells, wheels, voices, machinery. As far as the eye could see in either direction along the bay, houses lay scattered like building blocks abandoned by a sleepy child. Landlocked boats converted into buildings sat like fossils in the forest of masts and rigging that sprung from the sluggish water of the harbor.

On the quayside all was pandemonium. Huge bearded fellows yelled incomprehensible orders to the seamen on the boat; jostling among the bales and boxes she could see dozens of others, swarthy Mexicans in *serapes*, Chinese, American, coffee-colored Polynesians, dandies and roughs, sailors with muttonchop sideburns and tarred hats, and one or two slatternly-looking women whom Sarah realized with a delicious frisson of shock were prostitutes. Fallen women! She could not take her eyes off them. They looked sick and unhappy and their smiles were the grimaces of wild animals with tied feet.

A tall, broad-shouldered man with a serious face dominated by thick eyebrows and fine, intelligent eyes shouldered his way through the press of the crowd toward her.

"Mrs. Malone?" he called. "Mrs. Sarah Malone."

"I am she," Sarah said.

"Theodore Carver, at your service, ma'am," the man said. He looked uneasy, his expression that of a man bear-

ing bad news. He asked about her baggage and sent two boys scurrying to fetch everything and bring it to the quayside.

"Charlie is on his way down from Sacramento," he said. "He must have been delayed slightly, he should have been here hours ago." He said it all of a rush, like a man getting something unpleasant done. She had not seen Charlie for a long time. Another few hours wasn't going to make all that much difference. She watched as Theodore Carver supervised the loading of her baggage and trunk into a carriage. He was so solicitous about her, asking about the journey and the weather and the food, helping her across the rickety wharf and shouldering aside anyone who seemed likely to come anywhere near jostling her, that Sarah could scarcely suppress her own smile. Mr. Carver was obviously one of those men brought up in the belief that women are infinitely fragile, tender shoots. She wondered whether he knew that she had been working for ten hours a day, six days a week, in the sewing rooms back in Iowa. Probably not, she thought. Charlie won't have talked much of me.

She half heard Mr. Carver explaining, not once but half a dozen times, that Charlie had been up in the mountains on business, sure he would have been down for the arrival of Sarah's boat, but that something must have happened, the roads were not reliable, after all it was the rainy season.

"Don't concern yourself, Mr. Carver," she said several times, but still the man fussed. In the end Sarah concluded that he must enjoy fussing, and virtually ignored what he was saying. Instead she drank in her first impressions of the clattering, crowded, cacophonous streets of the city. She was surprised to see how steep they were now that she was ashore. They seemed at times to rise almost vertically away from the waterfront; not true, she knew, but it seemed that way. Montgomery Street was a hive of activity, two- and three-story brokerage houses and banks with signs that announced hours from six in the morning until ten at night. Men dashed hither and yon across the muddy street; the carriage made poor progress through the crowds that milled everywhere, ignoring all traffic as if the traffic

were not there. At the end of Montgomery Street Mr. Carver turned the carriage to the right.

"Market Street," he announced, and Sarah smiled. The sandy track, for that was all it was, skirted the muddy water of the bay shore. Up ahead there was a hill which she later discovered was called Rincon Hill. There were little white clapboard shacks everywhere, and also one or two of corrugated iron or galvanized sheet steel. Further up ahead Sarah saw that the road was planked and asked her husband's partner about it.

"Road to the Mission Dolores," he explained. "That's why I came this way. If we took Kearney we'd have to pay a toll."

A penny-pincher as well, she thought, chiding herself instantly for lack of charity. She saw the sign on the building then: CARVER BROS. & MALONE, MERCHANTS, and it took a moment for the fact that this building was partly owned by her husband to register with her. It looked solid and imposing and for the first time she realized that Charlie must be prospering here in California. His letters had given no indication of that, and it was a small shock. Theodore Carver took her inside where the clerks were waiting formally to meet her. She shook their hands, forgetting their names the instant she was told them. Everything was a mass of new impressions, it was too much to remember. She told herself that it didn't matter, that she would get to know them all later.

The store was just like a great big box with heavy oak beams across the roof from which were suspended all manner of goods. There was a counter to the right, at the end, and another to the left. Each counter had glass-fronted cupboards in front of it, and the walls behind each counter were likewise fronted by similar cupboards rising from floor to ceiling, all crammed with merchandise. There was a strong smell of cheese and coffee. A big tabby cat came out from behind the counter and rubbed against her ankles, purring. Sarah became aware that there were customers in the store, men who gaped at her as if she were a ghost. She did not know why but their intense stares were not disturbing at all. Their eyes were reverent, like children being told the story of baby Jesus.

It was an hour after her arrival before Charlie Malone came into the store, and when he did Sarah did not recognize him. Theodore Carver was showing her about the place when she turned and saw a man coming towards her, a strange look of mixed delight and apprehension in his eyes. He had a beard like a Tartar and he was worn thin with travel and hard work. Sarah felt a solid shock of recognition when she met the man's eyes: it was Charlie. She wanted to run to him and throw her arms around him, but she could not bring herself to display her emotions in front of the gawping clerks or Mr. Carver. And anyway, Charlie had never liked affection publicly displayed. She hesitated and Charlie saw her hesitation; his mouth set in a thin line beneath the beard.

"Charlie?" Sarah said hesitantly. "Is it you, Charlie?"

He was dirty and he smelled of horses and bay rum, and there was gray-red mud spattered on his boots and pants. His hands were calloused and the nails were broken. Sarah saw herself as she must look to him, cool and reserved, slim in a dress of dark-blue muslin. She wondered why he did not just come forward and take her in his arms, knowing that he never would, never could. He had to be the one who did it, but he never would be, any more than she could make the first move.

"Hello, Sarah," he said. Oh Charlie, she thought, don't just stand there looking at me. She wished that there was some way she could tell him not to be afraid, to come to her. She tried to tell him with her eyes.

"You're well, then?" Charlie said. "You had a good journey?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, a good journey."

"That's good. You've rested, had some food?"

"Yes," Sarah said.

"Good," Charlie said. He twisted the brim of his hat in his hands, and looked at Theodore Carver. Mr. Carver looked ill at ease, and Sarah was embarrassed. Perhaps he was wondering what the devil was wrong with the pair of them, a husband and wife who did not even embrace each other after a separation of more than three years.

"Theo," Charlie said. "I've got some news from Michigan Bluff. We've got some work."

"Let it wait, man," Theodore Carver said. "We can talk later."

"No," Charlie said, not looking at Sarah. "I'd as soon do it now."

Sarah felt an awful sensation inside her, as if someone had all at once taken all the air out of her lungs. It was all she could do to keep tears from springing to her eyes. If her husband had slapped her, he could not have made it more obvious that he cared little or nothing for her. She bent down and fiddled blindly with the strap around her trunk so that no one would see her distress. She did not know what to say or what to do. She had come to the other side of the wide world to find that her husband loved her no more now than he had the day he left Kanesville. She thought of the night that lay ahead and her mind closed with dread.

It started simply enough. It always does. Theo had realized immediately that Sarah Malone could be a great asset to the business. Women were still a rarity in San Francisco, intelligent ones even rarer; and he knew at once that there was a bright, informed intelligence behind Sarah Malone's downcast eyes. Theo also knew that the miners, starved for the sight of a decent woman, would flock to the store just to see Sarah, buy at any price just to have her wait on them. To that end he spent hours coaching her, explaining the procedures of the store, the best ways of displaying the goods, how he ordered them, the discounts applicable to them. As the year progressed Sarah's self-confidence grew, and Theo reinforced it by explaining how he ran the business, his arrangements with brokers and merchants back east, Ezra's shipping arrangements, freight charges, duties, imposts to which goods were liable at various ports and which must be considered in pricing. Once in a while Sarah would balk, saying that some task he had set her was beyond her experience. Theo would argue her into doing it anyway.

"Go ahead and fail," he told her. "You can't learn if you don't do it wrong once or twice."

"But . . . the money . . ." she said. "Mistakes cost money."

He smiled and touched her shoulder, then withdrew his hand more rapidly than was necessary, flushing slightly at the intimacy.

"Don't worry," he said, concealing his confusion. "We can afford it."

Still she hesitated, but Theo pushed her until she took decisions and made mistakes and learned not to make them a second time. A new light came into her eyes, a difference to the way she walked. She was lively and alive all the time, and not even the twelve- and sometimes fifteen-hour days she spent in the brick and stone building at the corner of Kearney and Market slowed her. She learned how to write small advertisements for sale goods, and special offers on slow-selling lines, and saw to their placement in the *Alta California*. She supervised the window displays, and brightened the store by placing bowls of wild flowers where the shafts of sunlight coming through the fanlights could catch their color. She learned quickly and remembered what she was taught. Within months of her arrival in San Francisco Sarah was taking work off Theo's shoulders to which he was more than glad to bid adieu.

Theo believed firmly that it was smart to look a little dumb; most of the people he did business with were trying desperately to appear smarter than they were. It all had to do with confidence, and Theo was confident about what he could do. It pleased him to know that everyone knew it, and it pleased him even more to know that not one of the men with whom he dined could boast a companion more attractive or pleasing than Sarah Malone. She was small, her hair long and black, and her eyes made you forget instantly that she was not beautiful. The men competed to make her smile, to bring that special twinkle to her eye, or for the pleasure of holding her lithe, firm, well-formed body as they danced. The women noted that Sarah was not pretty, that her face was unfashionably oval, her clothes adequate but not expensive, and they forgave her. Besides, she was a good listener, and seemed much more interested in their problems than any she might herself have. They discovered soon that Sarah never spoke of anything they told her, and she became their confidante. Soon

she knew the ills of half of San Francisco's marriages; she listened gravely but rarely advised. The women who told her their problems did not want to know how to solve them. When they artlessly asked her about her husband, and even more artlessly about Theo Carver, Sarah told them the truth. Charlie's work involved a great deal of travel on behalf of the company. Theo, she said, was kindness personified, and there was never in his conduct so much as a hint of anything except a desire to see that she enjoyed herself and met the right people. Indeed, so hard had he exerted himself on her behalf that by the end of 1853 Sarah knew everyone who was anyone in San Francisco.

Sarah knew that Theo was a deep and private person. His bluff pose was just that, a pose. Sometimes she marvelled at his friendship for and alliance with Charlie, who was everything Theo was not. Charlie believed in living for the moment, going his way and shucking responsibilities as fast as they showed their faces. Theo was a planner, a waiting man who embraced work and responsibility. She wondered why he had never married and assumed it must be because he was so immersed in his business and his ambitions. It never once occurred to her that it was because no woman had ever been close enough to Theo for long enough to awaken his emotions.

She did not mind that he was—to her, if not to others—so obviously in pursuit of wealth and power. It was not considered bad form to set out to make as big a pile as he could, nor was anyone much interested in the way he went about it, as long as his methods were not flagrantly illegal. "Characters" were treasured in San Francisco, whether they were ruffians with a surface coat of charm like Jim McCabe, who ran the El Dorado Saloon on Portsmouth Square, or deep-dyed snobs like the Gwins with their Southern-aristocratic coterie and their stagey manners.

Everyone went to the Gwins' musicales, receptions and dress balls, accepting as a small price Lucy Gwin's constant reminders that the house was the only one in San Francisco with its own ballroom. To these and all the other social events Theo and Sarah went together: subscription

balls at the Apollo Hall on Pacific Street, readings from Mr. Dickens's new novel *David Copperfield*, dinners at the McAllisters.

It was a long time before Theo asked himself why he always enjoyed himself when Sarah was with him, and why, when for one reason or another she could not come, he enjoyed himself not at all. He was in love with Sarah; and he did not know what to do about it. If it had been anyone else, he would have condemned the man for a fool, for of all the fools on earth none was bigger than the fool who loved another man's wife. Yet he did not count any day a good one in which he did not see her face, hear her laugh, see her walk across a room. He wanted to spend endless hours with her, find out what sort of child she had been, what she was afraid of, what she hoped for and dreamed about. Most of all he wanted to touch her hair, hold her close; but he did not dare.

"There's nothing to tell," she said when he first asked her about herself. "I'm just an ordinary girl. I lived on a small farm with my parents. Charlie must have told you."

"No," he said. "We haven't talked much about . . . that. About both of you. That was why I asked."

"There's nothing to tell," she repeated.

"Tell me anyway," he insisted. "There's time. We won't be busy for another half hour or so."

It was after two-thirty, and the lunchtime rush was over. They were sitting opposite each other at the little table in the kitchen to the rear of the store. The two clerks could easily handle what little business there would be until mid-afternoon.

"Why do you want to know?" Sarah asked, knowing why.

"I—it's important to me," Theo said, and because it was the truth and because it shone from his eyes Sarah averted her gaze, feeling color rise in her cheeks. I mustn't, she thought; she did not look at Theo because she was afraid of what she would see. She was not unaware of him, how could she be? They had danced together many times, and there had even been moments—just moments, no more than that—when she had wished she could let go,

lean upon him, let his strength carry them both. He was all the things Charlie was not and never would be.

To fill in the silence, which seemed to go on for a long time, Sarah spoke in a low voice about Terence Hutchinson, who had left the green hillsides of his native Wicklow a scant month after the Act of Union which indissolubly joined the Irish and English Parliaments in 1801. Terry Hutchinson was not a man to sit like a bump on a log in his native land while some pomaded fop in London made laws about how he should live and how much pay for the privilege. He was not an educated man, but he could read and do his alphabet. He had read the Declaration of Independence, spelling out the words painstakingly in the candlelight, nodding in agreement. "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another . . . certain inalienable rights, yes, yes, life, liberty, aye, that's it, the pursuit of happiness," he had said. He managed to get, God alone knew where from, a copy of a book called *The Rights of Man*, and Tom Paine's rhetoric convinced him that America was the only place left on God's green earth where it was possible for a man to be whatever he himself wanted to be or become. So he sold his smallholding and bought passage to America. He drove his wagon along the Cumberland Road until he reached the Ohio River, and there he staked out his claim and began farming. He was twenty-seven years old and he worked like a slave. By the time the Erie Canal was opened, and travel between Buffalo and New York suddenly reduced from twenty days to six, Terry Hutchinson had a good place on a hilltop above Fort Des Moines, set fair to profit from the increase in trade which would now flow westward.

Sarah loved her feckless father because he was kind and undemanding. He told her silly stories about foxes, and play-acted little charades with her, his voice light with whimsy, as delighted to play as any child. Erratic when the drink was on him—and as the years passed he drank more and more—Terry Hutchinson was no manager. It fell to his wife Kathleen to see to it that chores were done and the endless rota of toil on the farm completed. It was

a losing struggle even so, for three girls were no match at all for the relentless land. In the end Terence Hutchinson sold off a big parcel of land for eating money, and it broke him utterly to see the man to whom he'd sold it make a fortune putting town lots together and selling them.

He saw each of his darling girls married before he quietly unspectacularly died in his sleep. Sarah had married as well as could be expected, and better than most. Charlie had probably looked like a good catch to her father, she said.

"And you, Sarah?" Theo asked. "How did you feel about it?"

"I had little say in it," Sarah said. "It was done and that was that."

"Do you love him, Sarah?"

"Of course I do," she said automatically.

"Why of course?" Theo asked softly.

"Because he is my husband," she said. "That's all there is to it."

"I see," Theo said. He touched her forearm very gently, meaning to be reassuring, like a parent giving a child his hand in a dark lane.

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

"It's not that, Theo," Sarah said. "It's just that sometimes I . . ."

"Yes?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Tell me."

"I wish . . ." Sarah sighed, a long, deep sigh. She leaned back against the plank wall and wiped the perspiration away from her forehead with a rounded forearm. It was hot outside. Theo tried not to watch the dear, gentle movement of her body, the soft lift of her breasts.

"Sometimes I wish I could go away," she said. "Just for a while."

"Where to?"

"Nowhere special. A cornfield. I'd like to lie on my back in a cornfield and watch white clouds sail across the sky like boats in a harbor and have nothing to do at all."

"You can do that," he said. "Maybe I'll come, too."

"Maybe," she said smiling, "but not today."

She got up gracefully and went to her place behind the long mahogany counter facing the doorway. Theo smiled. The next morning he went down to Bancroft's book store and purchased an aquarelle, a cornfield with a blue sky and white clouds. He brought it back to the store and handed the package to Sarah.

"I thought you might like this," he said. "Until you see the real thing."

Her face was surprised, delighted, confused all at once. Theo heard one of the young assistants giggle, and he saw Sarah blush deeply. Rage swept through him; he wanted to take hold of the stupid clerk and shake him like a wayward urchin.

"It's . . . beautiful," Sarah said. "But, Theo, I can't accept it. It simply . . . would not do."

"I see," Theo said, his mouth setting like a knife cut. "Wait."

He went out of the store and back again to Market Street, bursting into Bancroft's like a gale and snatching up two more paintings like the first one. He threw down money in front of the astonished clerk without even waiting to see whether it was correct, and strode back up to his own store, shouldering passers-by aside with not so much as a sideways glance. As he entered the building he controlled his anger and drew a long, steadying breath. Then, with great pomp and mock formality, he presented one of the paintings to each of the other assistants. Finally, he again offered Sarah hers.

"Now," he said, smiling. "How can you refuse?"

She looked into his eyes and what she saw there made her duck her head, blushing again.

"Thank you," she said. Her voice was almost inaudible. "It . . . it is a lovely thought."

Nobody had ever bought her a present before, never one so impulsively, so unexpectedly. She could find no words to express this to Theo, especially not in front of everyone. Theo smiled. It wasn't a particularly good painting, anyway. But she liked it, and that was the main thing.

In December 1853 Ezra Carver made his first trip to California. It was almost a royal progress. Not only did he sail out of New York harbor in one of his own ships, but the ship that took him into San Francisco harbor was the flagship of the Merchants Express fleet. Gone were the days of patched-up tramps and dangerous "b'ilers." Ezra had consolidated his gains; there would be no more pirates like Graham and Peterson in his life.

"I've seen enough of California to convince me that I'll do better back east, Theo," he told his brother as they smoked their cigars in the little room behind the store on Kearney Street. "If I'm going to get into railroading—and I am—this isn't the place to do it. They talk a great deal about a transcontinental line, your friend Frémont and the rest of them. But it will be another ten years at least before it's built, mark my words."

"There's plenty of railroad talk," Theo said. "They're actually surveying that line we once talked about in Boston, the one from Negro Bar to Sacramento."

"They're calling Negro Bar Folsom now," Charlie said.

"Makes no difference what they call it," Ezra said. "It's not going to change my views. I've got the fastest, cheapest route to California tied up. It produces money, not pie in the sky. Who's putting up the money for this railroad of yours?"

"The three wise men of Sacramento," Charlie said. "Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, and Charlie Crocker."

"They're wasting their dollars," Ezra said. "Who's doing the survey?"

"You'll never guess," Theo said dryly.

"Harvey?" Ezra said, eyebrows raising. "Our Judah?"

"None other," Theo confirmed.

"Why, then, be certain the project will fail," Ezra said. "In the meantime, we'll consolidate in the stores, in real-estate, and transportation. I'll explore the railroad business back east, but I think we'd be wiser to stay out of it here. The more so if Harvey and your friend Frémont are involved, Theo."

"General Frémont is—" Theo began stiffly, but Ezra had no time for the man, whom he considered a liar and, worse, a man of straw. Theo admired him with the tenacity of one who will not allow anything to destroy a cherished illusion. The brothers had agreed to differ since Charlie Malone would throw in no casting vote.

"You never know," he had said. "Frémont might be useful one day."

"He might indeed," Ezra said. "I just wouldn't want to have to hang upside down until the day comes."

So they agreed upon their course of action. Theo and Charlie assured Ezra that things were considerably quieter then in San Francisco than they had been a little while before his arrival. "The vigilantes had seen to that," Theo said.

"I read about them," Ezra said. "Wasn't there some unofficial hanging?"

"I saw some of it," Charlie said. "And a fine-looking corpse English Jimmy made, too."

"English Jimmy?"

"Tell the whole story, Charlie," Theo urged. "Ez doesn't know about the Ducks."

"Well," Charlie said deprecatingly, "that would take a little time."

"There's plenty of that," Ezra said, leaning back in his chair and smiling. "Tell the tale, man. What are the Ducks?" Truth to tell, he wanted time to size Charlie Malone up, and what better way than to sit and watch while the man talked? He was a strange mix; was Charlie Malone, Black Irish the one moment, as sunny as a June

day the next. He was by turn irresponsible and cautious, calculating and rash, wry one moment, bitterly sarcastic the next. Expressions chased themselves across his face like clouds across a rainy sky. Ezra watched as Charlie nodded and relit his cigar.

To know what Ducks were, Charlie said, you had to know about Sydney Town. So to start with, the story of that corner of hell. It had grown up around a group of Chileño harlots and thieves working their trade along the San Francisco waterfront at the foot of Pacific Street and up Telegraph Hill. To this area gravitated all the refuse that the gold rush had washed on to the shores of Yerba Buena Bay: ruffians and ship-jumpers, whores and cut-purses and—especially—"ticket of leave" men, escapees from the British penal colonies in Australia who'd made it as far as America. By the end of the first year there were so many of them that the area they lived in—and controlled—was known as Sydney Town. The men themselves sometimes referred to as Coves, were mostly known as Sydney Ducks, probably because all their women called the johns they pulled "ducks" or perhaps "ducky." Whenever anyone heard of a particularly vicious crime in San Francisco, they'd say the Sydney Ducks were cackling again. Shanty after shanty, cesspit after deadfall after crib lined Pacific Street, and in them the thugs and harlots and hoodlums lived like seething, terrible, predatory insects. The women, Charlie said, would do anything—anything.

"When was all this?" Ezra asked.

"Fifty, fifty-one," Theo said. "A pinch of gold was all it took down there to buy any deviation ever conceived by the mind of man."

"Except that only a fool or a madman would have gone into Sydney Town with dust or specie on him," Charlie said. "It'd be long odds on his coming out alive if he did."

There was a place called the Boar's Head, he went on, where the principal attraction was a sexual exhibition featuring a woman and a boar. At the Goat and Compass Dirty Tom McAlear would eat anything, no matter how vile or disgusting, if given a few pennies. When they arrested him in '52 Tom confessed he hadn't washed for fifteen years, and that he'd been drunk for the last seven.

"Murderers, thieves, harlots, arsonists, swindlers, burglars," Charlie said. "All of them lived in Sydney Town. There was no law worth the name, although Mayor Geary did talk about setting up foot patrols."

"Oh yes," Theo said heavily. "Foot patrols."

"Well, like most of Geary's talk it came to nothing," Charlie said. "The Ducks just went on doing what they damned well liked, and not a hand was lifted to stop them."

"And what they liked best," Theo added, "was putting the town to the torch and looting the burning buildings."

"They had six enormous fires inside two years," Charlie said. "Each was proved to have been deliberately started by the Ducks. Still nothing happened. There was angry talk, of course. But nothing happened."

"Then how did the Committee of Vigilance get started?" Ezra asked.

"Strange, that," Charlie said. "It came out of a case of mistaken identity, so it did. Now who's for a drop more of that whisky?"

"I'll take a dram," Theo said, and held out his glass as Charlie sloshed the golden liquid into it. Ezra lit another cigar while Charlie leaned back in his chair and resumed his story.

"In February of 'fifty-one two men went into a store on Montgomery Street—"

"Jansen Bond's place, wasn't it?" Theo said.

"Right, and knocked the old boy cold. They got away with about two thousand in coin. Next day the police arrested a man named Berdue, Thomas Berdue. Only they said his name wasn't Berdue at all, but Stuart, English Jim Stuart, a well known Duck. People who claimed to know English Jim identified him by the scar on his ear and the fact that his left forefinger had been cut off. There was another fellow taken with this Berdue, a man called Windred. Both were hauled off to the courthouse for examination. The next thing you know there was a mob outside the place screaming for their blood."

"Four or five thousand men," Theo said. "Led by Sam Brannan."

"You wrote me about him," Ezra said. "A hothead, isn't he?"

"He might be that," Charlie said. "But he gets the job done."

"Even if he hangs the occasional innocent man in the doing," Theo observed drily. Well, Ezra noted: they're not friends, these two. Maybe the business will be the better run for that.

"The crowd wanted to hang someone, Charlie," Theo went on. "Anyone would have done, and Berdue was right handy."

"Well, it looked certain as sin that Berdue was English Jim, no matter how much he kept on denying it," Charlie said. "But they brought in two hundred special police to keep back the crowd, and whisked the prisoner off to Marysville out of harm's way. The crowd dispersed when the police told them that Berdue was sentenced to be hanged, and that he'd swing just as well in Marysville as anyplace else."

"Whereupon the Sydney Ducks, who were just as convinced that Berdue was Jim Stuart as everyone else, announced—yes, announced," Theo repeated, noticing Ezra's surprised look, "that there would be reprisals."

"And sure enough, on the fourth of May they set fire to the city," Charlie said. "They always chose a day when there was a strong north-easterly wind to fan the flames away from Sydney Town. They chose a good one on May the fourth."

"By the time the fire was burned out, three quarters of the city was in ashes," Theo said.

"Were you involved in all this, Theo?" Ezra said.

"No, I was up in Sacramento," Theo said.

"Anyway, a meeting was called," Charlie said. "At Sam Brannan's place down on Pine Street. There were about two hundred there. They decided to form some kind of law and order society to clean up the city. They would assemble with arms if they heard the bell of the old Monumental Fire Company being rung. Someone came up with the name, Committee of Vigilance."

A man named Jenkins stole a safe from a shipping office on the Long Wharf, he said. The owner, George Virgin,

raised the alarm and Jenkins was caught. Monumental's bell was rung, and the Vigilantes assembled, fully armed. They tried Jenkins and found him guilty. Sam Brannan announced the verdict to a cheering mob. It was still cheering when they hanged Jenkins like a dog on Portsmouth Square. Every man on the Committee laid a token hand on the hangrope: no one abstained. The reprisal was swift. The Ducks again set fire to the town, laying waste eighteen blocks of the business district. It was war to the knife and the knife to the hilt.

"Then came the surprise," Charlie said. "A Duck tried to rob a ship's captain down at the wharves, coshed him. The sailor's wife grabbed hold of the villain and wouldn't let him loose. Screamed bloody murder until some of the ship's crew came running. They beat about eight different colors of blood out of the fellow, and then delivered him to the committee. He told us he was English Jim Stuart."

There were nearly four hundred members of the committee by that time. They listened as English Jim confessed everything, the Jansen robbery being among the least of his sins. He had murdered Sheriff Moore up at Auburn as well.

"There wasn't a hell of a lot left to do after that but hang him," Charlie said laconically.

He said Colonel Jonathan D. Stevenson had relayed the verdict to the waiting crowd and asked for a voice confirmation. He got it with a roar that set the doves soaring down at Mission Dolores. Stuart didn't need anyone to tell him he was going to be hanged and that right quickly, but they told him anyway.

"This is a damned tiresome business," he said. "Get it over with!"

They took him down to the Market Street wharf, where a derrick had been raised. Stuart was as cold as a fish's belly until he saw the rope, and then he just broke open, Charlie said. He had to be dragged to the gallows.

"When was this?" Ezra asked.

"July the eleventh," Charlie said. "But English Jim wasn't the only one."

"They took two other men out of the prison," Theo said. "Hanged them as well."

"Lynched them?"

"Not exactly," Charlie said. "They'd already been tried and sentenced to death when the governor stepped in. A few days later he sent the sheriff with a writ of *habeas corpus*, and the men were taken to City Hall. Sheriff Hayes claimed he was going to try them again, but that seemed like a waste of good time. Mackenzie and Whitaker were guilty as hell, and everyone knew it."

So the following Sunday a heavily armed band of vigilantes burst into City Hall and took Mackenzie and Whitaker out. Twenty minutes later they were swinging from a beam sticking out of the main window of the meeting room of the committee, dead as mackerel. Sam Brannan and others made speeches to the huge crowd which had assembled to watch the hangings.

"There were a lot of 'as you may knows' and 'whereases'," Charlie said, "but they amounted to the same thing—neither Governor MacDougal nor Sheriff Hayes was going to stand in the way. The committee was going to clean up Sydney Town if it meant hanging every man living down there."

Within two weeks, he said, Sydney Town was all but empty. Boatloads of undesirables were observed heading upriver towards Sacramento and the open country beyond.

"And there's been no trouble since?" Ezra asked. He was surprised to find that he was not shocked by Charlie's story or the fact that, by inference, Charlie had been closely involved in the violent events he had just related. Somehow, one accepted that life was held in less respect out here.

"Ah, sure there's always trouble of some kind, though it's usually political these days," Charlie said. "At least it's not open anarchy and murder as it was in the days of the Ducks. That's all over. Women can walk the streets in safety again."

"Which reminds me to ask, how is your wife?" Ezra said. "Does she like it here?"

"She loves it," Theo said, a shade too warmly. "She's a great asset in the store," he added, altering his tone.

Not for the first time Ezra noticed the warmth in his brother's voice when he spoke about Sarah Malone, and

not for the first time he made a mental note to talk to Theo about her. An affair with a married woman was bad news; if the woman was married to one's partner it was disaster. Yet he had hesitated; meeting Sarah Malone it seemed inconceivable that she would countenance anything so foolish. She was attractive, intelligent, a level-headed woman, and Ezra found her warm and easy to like, with dark hair and a direct look in her eyes that told you instantly that she had no time for trifles. In spite of himself, he found he was attracted to her, and to his own surprise he realized that he was trying to impress her. He told her stories of his adventures in Nicaragua, of Carver Shipping, of other successes, drawing a picture of himself as a man in charge of his own destiny, sure of where he was going and how he was going to get there.

Sarah listened and watched, knowing what Ezra was doing and why he was doing it more clearly than Ezra knew himself. He had somehow sensed the attraction she felt towards Theo, and was competing as instinctively as trout takes fly. Beneath the urbanity, the stories of business success and revenges achieved she saw the little boy about whom Theo had told her, the boy who shouted " 'fraid o' nothing!" when his mother asked him if he was frightened during a thunderstorm. She wondered how it could have come about that Laura Carver had given birth to two sons so totally different in temperament: one so thoughtful, so generous-hearted, and the other so hard and self-centered. She found Ezra Carver a powerfully attractive man, but she also felt a little afraid of him. Such a man would expect a woman to be everything he wanted her to be, without regard for what she might want to be herself. Life with a man like that would always be exciting, but the excitement would have a heavy price tag. She had seen the photographs of Jane Carver, and wondered what she was like, what kind of relationship she and Ezra had.

As for Ezra, he could not imagine how such an attractive and lively girl could be married to anyone as obviously feckless as Charlie Malone. He could see what Malone had seen in Sarah; any fool could. But what in the name of creation had she seen in him? He had watched Malone carefully when Sarah was around. Their attitude

to each other was cool, almost wary. They showed little affection, and Ezra noted that as he noted most things. There was something out of kilter there, something he could not quite put his finger on. The man's fecklessness might be in order for the moment, but the time would come when Theo would need someone strong at his side, and Ezra was convinced Malone was a weak reed. The key phrase was 'for the moment'. For the moment, Sarah Malone was of such unquestionable value to the business that it would be stupid to suggest change. Besides, Ezra thought with a grin, I quite like having her around, myself.

"I imagine you're glad she's here," Ezra said to Charlie. "Oh, yes," Charlie said. "Naturally."

Naturally, he thought, bitterly, of course. Wouldn't any man be glad to have his wife with him here in this woman-starved country? Aye, he would, were the man anyone but Charlie Malone and the woman anyone but his cold wife Sarah. He could not bear to dwell upon the thought of the first night with her, when he had been so eager and she so contained. It was only the first of many nights which followed, nights when they lay together after their joining further apart from each other than they had been before. A year she's been here now, Charlie thought, and I know her no better than I did the day I left Kanesville. Open yet baffling, pliant yet hostile, amenable and yet indifferent, Sarah defeated him without a battle. She hid nothing from him but remained totally hidden. Her body was unresponsive to his, yet she did not deny him. She said she loved him; he knew she did not. It had been a mistake to bring her out to California. A mistake to marry at all, Charlie thought. He had been free and footloose and he should have stayed that way. After he'd come out to the diggings it would have been so easy to cut adrift, and that was what he should have done. The best times of a man's life were the ones with no women in them at all.

Sarah's first real friend was Louisa McAllister, the wife of Theo's lawyer. Hall had come out to San Francisco originally to set up as a merchant, but soon discovered that his legal training was infinitely more valuable than his ability to stand behind a counter. Louisa was a New York Cutler, considerably older than Sarah, with five children whom she—and everyone else—adored. She was brilliant, dynamic and charming, and—quite why, Sarah never understood—she “took” immediately to the younger woman. Subtly, without ever once making it seem patronizing, she began to map out Sarah's social education. She loaned her books—making no concessions at all to Sarah's reading ability, expecting everything of her and using Sarah's admiration and respect for her to spur the younger woman to greater effort. Louisa played the piano impeccably, and sang like a nightingale. In so doing, she introduced Sarah to her own favorites, Verdi, Schubert, Ferencz Liszt—“Never refer to him as Franz, Sarah, that is a Germanization of his beautiful Hungarian name,” she said. She saw to it that Sarah went with her to every theatrical and artistic event that the growing city had to offer, such as they were. Theo went as well sometimes, grumbling good-naturedly at having to waste time listening to such as Christy's Minstrels at Tom Maguire's but tapping his knee and humming off-key as the blackfaced comedian sang

Wheel about and turn about and step just so
Ev'ry time I turn about I jump Jim Crow!

They went to Meiggs's Musical Hall and heard the San Francisco Philharmonic playing Haydn's "Surprise" symphony, and to see Lola Montez more for her scarlet reputation than for her acting ability. They saw the Marsh Juvenile Comedians, thirty children ranging in age from five to fifteen, who sang, did impressions, and gave dramatic readings. They saw the tragedian James Stark, and Edwin Forrest playing opposite his divorced wife Catherine Sinclair—a breathtaking contempt for convention that had the San Francisco ladies gossiping about the relationship for weeks after the event. They saw Mathilde Heron in *Camille*, and a little gamine named Lotta Crabtree, who was said to be a protégé of Lola Montez. Lotta danced and sang and played the banjo and, concentrating upon songs about home and mother, drew roars of delight and appreciation from the audience, many of whom were miners. They showered the stage with gold and silver coins and even buckskin pokes of gold dust, which were rapidly picked up by a little colored boy who never once even glanced at the audience which was making his mistress rich.

Sarah loved it all. The theatre was a place of such light and color that it bedazzled her, and she oohe-ed and aaah-ed as guilelessly as a child, loving the performers, identifying with them, tapping her feet to their tunes, wagging her head from side to side.

"My child," Louisa said, "I vow you'd be on the stage with them if there was half a chance of it!"

"I do believe I would," Sarah said. "I love it so!"

The roars of applause from the miners excited her strangely, bringing back memories of her girlhood, of being dressed in home-made costumes for the school plays. She had always loved dressing up, play-acting. If she could have been an actress she would have become one, but a farmer's daughter could only dream.

They were strange, openhearted, unpredictable, foolish, sometimes heartbreakingly boyish, the miners. Every day they came into the store, their aching need for a gentle

word or the sight of a woman in clean linen so obvious that it was utterly moving. Men came fifty, a hundred, two hundred miles to buy some little trifle in the store, not because they needed a file or an axe or a shovel, but because, in discussing its merits and value, they might for a while talk to a woman who was not a prostitute. No matter that, as soon as their conversation was over, those same men would plunge into the most dismal dead-falls in Sydney Town, squandering the gold they had torn from the earth at God alone knew what cost in sweat and blood and fever-wracked nights at the tables of the rapacious gamblers or the even more vicious stews around the saloons. Theo had told Sarah that some of the gamblers and most of the madams were banking more than twenty thousand a week. It was unbelievable, but it was true. What seemed tragic to Sarah was that most of the miners would never see that much money in a lifetime.

They seemed not to care one way or the other. They were adrift, their time in California was an adventure, a slice taken out of normal life, not counted. They did not want a career, nor did they seek a future. They had little or no time for bankers, merchants or businessmen, for they could neither emulate nor admire them. A man worked hard, they said, and if he got lucky—and every one of them believed that he was going to—he found gold. They had to believe that, otherwise their lives would have been unsupportable.

They asked Sarah to wish them luck and she would do so. She loved their cheerful optimism, their ungrudging delight on the rare occasions that one of their number struck it heavy, their philosophical fatalism when they lost every penny they possessed at the tables. "Home, or the diggings again!" they would shout as they staked their last dust on a whirling wheel or the turn of a greasy card. When—inevitably—they lost, they would groan theatrically and clap hands to their foreheads like ham actors. "The diggings, by thunder!" they would grin, and off they would go to look for a grubstake, enough money to buy a pick and a shovel and start all over again. One might have been forgiven for thinking that they even enjoyed the prospect,

although why the backbreaking toil of the diggings should seem an attractive proposition Sarah never understood.

"It's a disease," Theo explained to her. "They can never admit defeat when the next shovelful of dirt they turn may be the one that has the gold in it."

They told her endless stories of men striking it heavy up in the mountains. They told her other stories, too. They told her about the miner who had come down to Hangtown with his pockets full of gold dust, determined to have himself a hell of a time, begging your pardon, ma'am. He went into a restaurant and told the owner to cook him a meal.

"What do you want to eat?" the cook asked.

"What costs the most?" said the miner.

"Eggs and oysters," cookie said.

"OK, fry me up a dozen of each," the miner said, and sat down to the first Hangtown Fry. Everybody who struck it heavy bought one first thing; it was like turning your money in your pocket when you saw a new moon. They told her about how at John Henry Brown's saloon in San Francisco a miner rode up on a mule and told John Henry he planned to ride the mule right on through the plate glass window fronting the street. John Henry gently pointed out that it could turn out to be the most expensive ride the miner had ever taken, because that was real plate glass there, shipped all the way around the Horn from New York.

"How much a thang like that cost?" the miner asked.

"Five hundred dollars at the least," John Henry told him.

The miner threw a poke of gold dust in front of the saloonkeeper and told him to take out seven hundred and fifty's worth, "just in case." Then he kicked the mule into a run and went straight through the window with a yell that would have made Lazarus jump out of his grave.

All those stories Sarah heard, and many more besides, just as she learned to know where the storytellers came from and what they were called by the way they spoke. Missouri valley miners were called "Pikes" and, predictably, Easterners, no matter whence they hailed, were all Yankees. All Mexicans without exception were Sonorans,

all Polynesians Kanakas, Orientals Coolies, Irish Paddies, and the British to a man were known as Limeys. They called the Frenchmen Keskydees on account of their universal habit of asking each "Qu'est-ce-qu'il dit?" (What did he say?) when spoken to in English.

Sarah understood why the miners were boisterous and lacking in social artifice. No one had a reputation to maintain in a mining camp, where anything went as long as you paid your way and didn't steal. Vocabulary soon became totally unfettered since there were no ladies around, and manners were a luxury that few cared to afford. "Stretch or starve" was the rule at table, and the finer things had to wait until a fellow could afford to indulge in them. As for women, well, Sarah heard the story of a saloon-keeper up at Devil's Retreat who had exhibited a lady's bonnet and boots for a dollar a look—and miners had queued in the rain to see them. With nothing else on their minds, they fell willingly, uncaring, into the hands of saloon-keepers and brothel owners. A man who had spent fourteen hours up to his navel in ice-cold water smashing a pickaxe into unyielding rock or clay figured he'd earned his lightning-flash by sundown. By midday on Sunday, when nobody worked at the diggings, most of those who could afford to be were dead drunk.

Sarah felt sorry for her "boys," for the moneymen were already taking over the mining areas. The days of the washpan and the rocker were numbered. Sophisticated methods were being brought into use—stamping mills, sluices. The product of the gold fields was moving into the soft, uncalled hands of the Montgomery Street bankers, and that meant less left for the miners, of whom there were many, many more than there had been at the beginning, perhaps as many as a quarter of a million. In 1850 day wages had been about ten dollars. Two years later it had dropped to six dollars, and these days it was a lucky miner who had a quarter of an ounce of dust in his sluicebox at the end of a fourteen-hour day.

"It's inevitable," Theo said. "Sad, but inevitable. They don't know the meaning of the word thrift. They can no more plan ahead than a baby. They never change because they don't know how to. It's no use telling them that in

1852 more than eighty million ounces of gold were taken out of the state, they simply can't conceive of it. To them mining is a game, not a science. Economics, growth, investment—foreign languages! What happens to the gold after it's passed through their hands is of no interest to them whatsoever. Yet gold can't be got now without capital. Hand your 'boys' capital and ten minutes later the harlots and the gamblers have got it. They don't want to buy machinery to find the gold. They want to walk up a hill and find it by simply turning over the topsoil."

Theo was right, she knew. It did not make her any the less sympathetic towards the miners who came into the store. If anything, the opposite: when she saw they were down on their luck she would tip a little extra on the scales. A half ounce of sugar or flour that Theo would never miss could well keep the lad she was giving it to alive. They watched Sarah with eyes glowing with love and lust and spoke of her among themselves as if she were a saint.

When, as sometimes happened, Theo would escort her into a restaurant for supper after the theatre—an oyster and terrapin snack at Captain Cropper's on Second Street, perhaps—the miners present would rise from their tables and remain standing until Sarah was seated. If she went for a morning stroll with Louisa McAllister, hats would be raised, clumsily gallant bows made to them, while a knot of boys just arrived in town would tag along at a respectful distance, mouths agape at the sight of so much sheer femininity. Louisa's coachman, a huge negro freed man named Sam, accompanied them on all such expeditions. Hall insisted upon it, Louisa said; he was constantly afraid that she would be molested.

"Truth of it is, I'm in much more danger from some of those South Park *gentlemen* than from any of these boys, however rough they may look," Louisa said.

So Sarah's totally unusual life became routine. On fine days she strolled with Louisa. If it rained, she might spend that morning hour Theo insisted upon her keeping as hers doing any one of the dozen chores that always lay waiting. At midday she would take a light lunch, sometimes with Theo if he was not out on business, or alone otherwise.

Evenings were always booked weeks ahead, with musicales and dinners and theatre visits planned long in advance. There were business friends of Theo's to be entertained; they usually went to Martin's or Clayton's further up Commercial Street for such affairs. There were dances at the Oriental Hotel on Bush Street, but after a while ladies ceased going because the gentlemen who sat around beneath the porticoed balcony which embellished the hotel's four-story façade inspected all arrivals with the unabashed stares of horse-breeders at an auction. Many of them were men Louisa and Sarah knew—hence Louisa's remarks about South Park "gentlemen." Sarah knew that there was a double standard. Many of the married men who frequented the houses in South Park were womanisers of the worst kind. It was not—among the men, at least—considered in any way reprehensible, as long as one was not found out or as long as one's liaisons were not too brutally flaunted. Sarah found it appalling that men could profess love and respect for one woman while openly consorting with the lowest creatures of the parlour-houses. They did, however, and nobody challenged them.

The women busied themselves with their committees and their charities, their Fine Arts societies and their amateur dramatics and operatic evenings, pretending the while not to notice the affair their husbands conducted. For such ostrich-like behavior Sarah had no time at all. Raising funds for charitable work in the slums was praiseworthy, but she could not mix with the old hens (as she privately thought of them) without speaking her mind the way Louisa could and did.

"Best keep away from them, then," Louisa said. "They wouldn't thank you for rubbing their noses in it."

"I don't know how you can stand it," Sarah said.

"I don't actually have a great deal of choice," Louisa said, "but even if I had, I think I would still hold my counsel."

"They're . . . it's all such hypocrisy," Sarah said. "They all talk of helping the downtrodden and poor, but do any of them ever actually do anything about it?"

"Oh come, my dear," Louisa smiled tolerantly. "Aren't you expecting rather a lot?"

"They're afraid to go where the real vice and degradation are," Sarah said emphatically. "In case they bump into their husbands coming out of one of those places."

"You're young, Sarah," Louisa said. "As you get older, you will learn that we women have to compromise. Men have needs that women do not. It's as well to overlook how they satisfy them. Confrontation achieves very little."

"That's the coward's way!" Sarah flared.

"And yours the fool's," Louisa retorted. "Men live in their world, my dear, and we in ours. It's better that way. Let the women do what they can for the unfortunates of the city. It is little enough, God knows."

"Saving peasant girls from a fate worse than death?" Sarah said. "Is that all there is for an intelligent woman to do in this life?"

"Better that than nothing," Louisa said. "And, Sarah—you must at least admit that giving those poor unfortunates work in respectable homes is better than leaving them in the brothels!"

"I'd have to try the brothels first!" Sarah retorted spiritedly, then stamped her foot as Louisa burst into uncontrollable laughter. She rocked back and forth in her chair until Sarah, realizing what she had said, could no longer maintain her anger. Soon both of them were laughing until the tears rolled down their cheeks.

They agreed to differ.

"We shall have to find you something else to do when I am off on my charitable work," Louisa said, with just a hint of an edge in her voice. Sarah smiled and did not rise to the bait. She knew she would never see eye to eye with Louisa on the subject of the Chileño girls. "I think perhaps that reading talent of yours ought to be put to good use," Louisa said, riding roughshod over Sarah's half-hearted protests. Sarah had once told Louisa that if she could have chosen what to be, she would have been an actress.

Louisa introduced her to Elizabeth Hope, a young blue-stocking who devoted her every spare moment to running an amateur dramatic society which put on plays and readings to benefit the Mission Dolores Indians. She was a tall girl, full of enthusiasm and energy, the kind that captain teams in school and never have much time for boys. Her

husband was some years older than she, patient and forbearing and obviously deeply in love with his spirited wife.

"It'll be marvellous to have some new talent in the group," she said. "Every little helps, y'know. What sort of thing do you like, Sarah—d'ye mind if I call you Sarah?"

"No, of course n—"

"Good, come along Wednesday afternoon about two, we'll look out for you. D'ye know where we rehearse?"

"Yes, Louisa told m—"

"Good, marvellous, we'll see you then," Liz said, as if she would never have time to wait for anyone to finish a sentence. "Is that the time? I've got to dash! Tons to do, y'know!"

She was gone in a flurry of coat and gloves, and Sarah looked at Louisa and giggled.

"Well?" Louisa said. "What do you think?"

"I like her," Sarah said.

"Good," Louisa said, as though that settled that.

The Mission Players rehearsed in a room above a butcher's shop on Kearney Street, their every sentence, their every speech punctuated by the thudding of the axes below, Shakespeare to the accompaniment of bawled shouts for steaks, tripe, pork chops. Most of the company were women: the menfolk were about the more serious business of making their points and moving up. Life was too real to permit their wasting whole afternoons rehearsing *Macbeth* or *She Stoops To Conquer*. As a consequence, women stood in for the male actors during the afternoon rehearsals. Sarah found herself pressed immediately into reading Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, and she lost herself in the story. After the rehearsal Liz Hope came across to her, eyes aglow with enthusiasm.

"Sarah, that was marvellous!" she exclaimed, "really good! Have you ever done this sort of thing before?"

"A few times," Sarah began, meaning to tell Liz about her tentative first steps to realize her girlhood dream of being an actress by appearing with an amateur company in Des Moines. She got no further than her first three words.

"Thought so!" Liz said, running a hand distractedly through her blonde hair. It had all fallen away from the

chignon, with tendrils straying everywhere, giving Liz a distracted look that matched her bustling air.

"That certainly wasn't the first time you've read Shakespeare, I can see that." Liz said, patting her head to locate the pencil she had stuck into her hair.

"No," Sarah said. "I used to—"

"I think we'll give you a shot at Portia," Liz said, abruptly, making a note on the yellow legal pad she was carrying. "I must go and have a word."

And she was gone, calling loudly for one of the other girls. Sarah smiled. Strange that all those long winter Des Moines nights, when she had lain before the flickering fire and read her way through Terence Hutchinson's battered copy of Shakespeare's *Collected Works*, should come to fruition here. She remembered her first discovery of the plays, the mounting excitement and growing delight with which she had devoured them. From the first part of *Henry IV* to *Twelfth Night*, every line, every stage direction—how she had been awed by the sweep and power, the brilliance and movement of the stories. Ah, how that child had longed to be an actress, to find in make-believe the escape from reality for which she yearned! And perhaps still does, she thought, with a sudden flash of insight.

Preoccupied thus with the preparations to stage *The Merchant* in September of that year, Sarah was less aware than she might otherwise have been that Theo was tense, constantly on edge, and away from the store a great deal of the time. She knew, of course—all San Francisco knew and was agog about the fact—that "Honest Harry" Meiggs had been exposed as a thief and a swindler of the most astonishing proportions. San Francisco businessmen had been stunned by his defection. Meiggs had bought a ship called the *American* and, on the pretext that he was taking a cruise, had sailed out of the Golden Gate never to return, taking his entire family—including his brother, John, who was comptroller of the city—with him. Meiggs left behind all his businesses, his wharf, his lumber mills, everything. The canaries were still chirruping in their ornate cages in the echoing house on Telegraph Hill when the police arrived. Everything would have to be sold, of course: Meiggs had left debts of more than a million dol-

lars, eight hundred thousand of them in forged city warrants. Hundreds of small investors and dozens of bigger ones, men who had backed Meiggs's grandiose real-estate schemes, were in dire straits. Theo was working like an absolute madman, often until four and five each morning, helping on the one hand those friends whom he wished to assist, and on the other busily capitalizing on the misfortunes of those he did not.

Meiggs's flight kicked over a dunghill, and the mess it revealed became the scandal of the day. City Hall was being plundered by corrupt politicians—Theo told Sarah that David Broderick, a former New York saloon-keeper and Tammany henchman who had his eye on the post of United States Senator, was milking city funds to the tune of more than a quarter of a million dollars a year. His henchmen all had their hands in the cash register—Dutch Charley Duane, Bill Carr, Reuben Maloney, Bill Lewis and Yankee Sullivan, vicious thugs all of them, enforcers who protected the system and terrorized anyone who tried to challenge it.

"It's impossible," Theo said. "If a man speaks against them, they simply beat him into submission. They are the lowest sort of brutes. Take Sullivan, for instance. They say he had a saloon on Walker Street in New York before he came out here. Now he is in city government. How can you respect an office held by someone whose sole claim to fame is that he is the ugliest man in California?"

It was a rhetorical question, Sarah knew; she remained silent.

"There's Billy Mulligan, another of Broderick's people," Theo went on. "Collector for the county treasurer, and he can't spell or count past fifty."

"Can nothing be done?" Sarah said.

"Oh, something will happen," Theo said. "There'll be anarchy in the streets again if change doesn't come, you mark my words. The thieves and harlots are all back."

"You mean—the vigilantes?"

"I've heard talk," Theo said. "Such talk as I haven't heard for years. It's a damnable situation. Nobody seems to know what to do for the best."

They were travelling along Market Street in the carriage

on their way back from a pleasant evening with the McAllisters. There had been music and a fine dinner served beneath the crystal chandeliers. Theo had danced with her four or five times, and Sarah could almost sense him making a conscious effort to shed his business worries and depression, to make the evening lighthearted and enjoyable. She wished she could find a way to tell him how much she appreciated what he had done for her. She wished there were some way she could tell how much she liked him, but one could not do that. The lighted windows went past the closed coach. It was warm; the vehicle lurched and their shoulders touched. Sarah laid her hand gently on Theo's forearm.

"You look tired, Theo," she said softly. "You work much too hard. You must try and get some rest."

Theo sighed. He *was* tired. The endless discussions, the arguments, proposals and counter proposals, the interminable meetings to decide which stop-gap measures could be taken with regard to any one of three dozen enterprises in which he had somehow got himself involved—all these weighed heavily on Theo. They were exciting, fascinating, wonderful days; he was constantly elated by his own success, even when it was success he had confidently predicted for himself. Yet for all the success, for all the money, for all the destinies which he now controlled, Theo felt unfulfilled. He was a man who had everything, except someone to share it with. He touched Sarah's hand.

"Yes," he said. "I am tired."

She wondered why he did not kiss her. She was very close to him, close enough to feel the warmth of his body. She felt strangely removed from reality, aware that what she was thinking and feeling was wrong, but somehow it didn't seem to matter. All that mattered was the urgent hum of wanting in her body. It was like the beating of drums and she could not imagine how he could be unaware of it. Her eyelids felt heavy; her lips parted slightly. There was something in the air, like the feel of a storm coming.

Theo felt the change, too. A tightness in his throat and stomach made him feel strangely powerless, as if he was afraid to move for fear of startling some wild thing in a

forest. Sarah's eyes were huge in the semi-darkness, unreadable. He wanted to reach out and touch her, but he hesitated lest he be rejected and in rejection lose her completely. He remained utterly still. There was a long, empty moment of time, suspended and unreal, in which he kissed her a thousand times in imagination, in which she surrendered totally to the force of him. Then the coach jerked to a stop outside the store on Kearney Street and the coachman jumped down to open the door.

Theo got out, startled to find that his hands were trembling. He held Sarah's hand as she got down from the coach and she did not look at him as she went into the building. The bright lamplight gave them both the opportunity to pretend to be dazzled by it, to use the moment to adjust to reality. There was no one around; it was late, and the other clerks were long since abed. They looked at each other and Theo sighed.

"I'll say good night then, Theo," Sarah, moving towards the staircase. He sensed her reluctance to go in the way she moved, and also apprehension. He did not know what to do. Something closed his throat tight.

"I love you, Sarah," he said, agonies of wanting in his voice.

"I—oh Theo, don't," Sarah said. "Don't, don't."

"It's no use," he said. "No use at all. I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do about it."

"Please, Theo, no," Sarah said, but she did not turn away when he stepped closer to her. Her eyes were unfathomable. He stood even closer and put his hand on each side of her face and held her like that. She looked up at him without speaking. Oh Theo, she thought.

"I can't help this," he said as he kissed her—or did she just think that he said it? As his lips touched hers Sarah felt the world tilt, and she was powerless to prevent herself from responding to the surge of warmth and love in Theo's kiss. Then, like a douche of ice-cold water, reality burst upon her and she pulled back, breathing fast. She ran up the stairs and into her room, closing the door and then going to her dressing-table. She sat there staring at her reflection in the mirror, seeing herself as if she were a stranger in her own body. Her mind was spinning and she

did not know how she could ever face the morrow. She was happy and at the same time cast down. She knew in her heart that she had wanted Theo to take her in his arms, yet at the same time guilt consumed her. Was this love? And if it was, then what was it she felt for Charlie? Was it merely desperate need that had made her respond to Theo's kiss? How could she have done that if she did not love him? Was there more than one kind of love—could one, perhaps, love two men in different ways? Did she actually love Charlie Malone at all? Torn between a thousand such conflicting thoughts, another thousand unanswerable questions, seeing nothing ahead but pain, Sarah sat silently as the hours slid into history. She did not know how to face her future now. Everything had been so ordered, so safe. Now it was all changed and no matter what she did it would never be the same again.

"Well," Charlie said, "I've done it. I've bought him out!"

"What?" Sarah looked up from her ironing. "You've done what?"

"Your friend, Theo," Charlie said, with a grin that reminded her of a malevolent goblin. "I've bought the store. It's mine."

Sarah gazed at her husband in astonishment, seeing him as if for the first time. Charlie had changed in the years he had spent on the road. The boyishness was all gone, and the body was thickened by drinking. There was a shiftiness in his eyes that had not been there before. She knew he was gambling heavily, but there was nothing she could do about that. Or about the demands he made upon her when he finally came back to their house on Clay Street after a night's carousing at the El Dorado or some other saloon. She was terrified of disease and could speak of it to no one. Her life had changed so drastically in such a short time that Sarah could scarcely believe it.

At first, when Theo had told her that his growing involvement with other businesses—banking, shipping, express companies linked with Ezra's enterprises back east now occupied more and more of his time than the store—would probably mean that Charlie would no longer need to travel after the end of the year, she had been relieved. Charlie's return, his mere presence, would prevent the relationship between herself and Theo from growing any stronger. She was afraid that people might be talking about

her and Theo—speculating, perhaps, but aware that there was something stronger than friendship between them. She did not want to hurt Charlie like that, even though, knowing Theo loved her, there were times when she longed to surrender, to let whatever was going to happen happen, to let Theo take the burden upon his broad shoulders, simply not to fight any more. She could have resisted infatuation, for there had been plenty of that. Theo's love was something she could not handle, except by keeping it at bay. Charlie's return to San Francisco was one way to do so, and to Theo's surprise she had welcomed it. Charlie rented a little house on the north side of Clay Street and Sarah spent an excited month furnishing it, her first real home. Everyone gave her and Charlie presents, and she knew that if he had wanted to they could have moved without difficulty into the same social life, the same set of friends, as Theo. Not for Charlie the stuffed shirts, as he called them. He soon established a routine of disappearing after dinner and not returning home until well after midnight. At first Sarah thought it might be another woman, and she was strangely saddened by the thought. She soon learned, however, that it was drink and the gambling tables, always the gambling tables. So life at Clay Street became not just a disappointment, but a sentence of imprisonment. Alone all the time, Sarah could no longer expect to be invited to dinner at the Gwin house, supper at the McAllisters', with Theo as before. The proprieties had to be observed. Charlie away in the mountains made it acceptable for her to be escorted by a man not her husband. But Charlie in San Francisco was another matter entirely. In turn, Charlie made no attempt to conceal his contempt for the pretensions of the "nobs," preferring the company of men and women whom Sarah knew to be riff-raff—Jim McCabe and Charlie Cora, David Broderick and Yankee Sullivan, Jimmy Casey and the rest of the Tammany crowd. As a man who indulged in some gambling, Charlie might still have been acceptable in the mansions of the upper set, for although there was less tolerance of gamblers now than there had been in the good old days—and already people were referring to the early years of San Francisco as "the good old days"—

gambling in itself was not considered cause for censure. Friendship with political fixers, opportunist saloon-keepers and bawdy house madams was quite different, but Charlie would not change his ways for anyone, certainly not for such as the McAllisters, not even for Theo, not even, when she asked him—and she asked him so humbly!—for Sarah, his wife.

So Charlie plunged and plunged and plunged again at the tables, and drank and drank again as he did it. In the end there was nothing for it but to face him with his omissions and, hating having to do it, Theo did just that.

"This can't go on, Charlie," he said. "You're not even pulling your weight any more."

They were sitting in the counting-room at the rear of the store. Charlie had a stinking hangover from the previous night's drinking. He had lost well over five hundred at the El Dorado, and to compound his sense of injury there had been a squalling, name-calling fight with Sarah to start the day. He felt like hell and he said as much to Theo, who grinned sympathetically.

"You're not the first man to feel like that," he said, "and I'd be the last to grudge you a drink once in a while, in ordinary times. But Charlie, these aren't ordinary times. I've got a lot of things on my plate, and I need you here running the store. Dammit, man, that's why we agreed you'd stop travelling!"

Charlie nodded. Times had changed. The days of the pick-and-shovel miner were gone, and it was no longer either necessary or profitable for Charlie to wander from town to mountain town like an itinerant tinker. Yet for all that he felt a sense of loss. He missed the yellow-brown hills, the freedom and rough camaraderie, the filthy jokes, the all night poker games, the drinking sessions. He was not all that sure that he was cut out for city life, for business—and yet he knew that he had to do something. At least the partnership gave him something, a base.

Theo looked drawn and tense, and Charlie felt a twinge of guilt. What Theo said was true: Charlie wasn't pulling his weight at all. Theo had pointed out that Charlie's insistence on having Sarah no longer working in the store would add to his burdens, but Charlie had been adamant.

A wife's place, he said, was at home. She didn't need to work. They had money. He didn't want anyone thinking they didn't have enough.

"There's a simple enough solution, Theo," he said, the idea coming to him out of the blue, fully formed and so obvious that he almost shivered with self-congratulatory pleasure.

"A solution?" Theo said.

"Sell out," Charlie said.

"Sell out? Why? To whom?"

"To me," Charlie said.

"I don't understand."

"It's simple enough, Theo," Charlie said patiently. "Instead of us signing a new agreement for 1855, you'll sell your share of the store to me."

"Well," Theo said. He frowned and then looked up at Charlie with a small smile on his face. "One thing: what were you planning to use for money to buy me out?"

"Well," Charlie said, "I thought you might loan me something."

Theo looked at his partner for a long time and then shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I think you're serious," he said.

"I'm serious."

"Then you're crazy," Theo said. "You need sixty thousand at least to buy me out. I wouldn't loan you sixty cents. You'd gamble it away at the El Dorado before the ink was dry on the bank draft."

"That's rough talk, Theo," Charlie said, looking away. "You've never said anything like that to me before."

"I've never had to, Charlie," Theo said. "That doesn't make it less true."

"Then I'll tell you what to do," Charlie said. "Don't loan the money to me. Loan it to Sarah."

"What?"

"Loan the money to Sarah. Make her part-owner of the store, not me. That would make a difference, wouldn't it?"

"It might," Theo said cautiously. "I thought you didn't want her to work any more?"

"Ah, that'd be different. Her being the owner."

"I don't see that," Theo said, "but it makes no odds. How long would you want to pay back the money?"

"On our profits over the last three years, I'd say you'd have the money and the interest in your pocket by the end of 'fifty-six," Charlie said.

"That's optimistic."

"I told you once a long time ago that I was a little on the optimistic side, Theo. I haven't changed."

Theo sat silent for another long moment. In many ways, Charlie's offer was a godsend. The store, for all its profitability, consumed time far outweighing its value, time he would prefer to devote to more pressing—and more profitable—interests. And there was a secondary, but no less tempting aspect to Charlie's offer. By setting Charlie up in the store, Theo would be releasing Sarah from her imprisonment. Her presence at Kearney Street would mean that he could see her regularly without having constantly to invent excuses for calling at the Clay Street house. It would mean that she could once again see dear friends, talk to customers, escape from the drudgery that was making her a pale, thin shadow of the dark and lovely woman she had been.

"All right," Theo said finally. "Let's go and see McAllister."

The agreement was drawn up on November 15, 1854, the third anniversary of their original partnership. Theo and Charlie shook hands at the door of McAllister's office and wished each other luck. There was sadness in both men's eyes. We could have been friends, Theo thought. We very nearly were. Charlie bobbed his head and went out, hurrying down to Portsmouth Square for the drink that by now he badly needed. He wondered whether he had done the right thing. He wondered what Sarah would say when he told her. She would be pleased, that for sure. Pleased that he had decided to be a property owner, a businessman in his own right. He put on a bit of a swagger as he pushed through the crowd at the El Dorado. At least they'd give him more credit at the tables now, he thought.

"Have you been drinking?" Sarah asked. Christ, he thought bitterly, wouldn't you know it?

"If you mean have I had a drink," Charlie said, "the answer is yes. If you mean am I drunk, the answer is no. I am not drunk. I bought the store. It's ours. No more Carver and Malone. Just Malone. Us!"

"But Charlie," Sarah protested, dismayed, "you don't know anything about running a store. The ordering, the bookkeeping, anything. You—"

"Don't need to, do I?" Charlie grinned, throwing his hat spinning on to the sofa at the far side of the room. "You know all that."

"You want me to teach it to you?"

"No, my dear wife," Charlie said holding grimly on to his feeling of triumph. "I want you to run the store. Everything. I'll be there, of course. I'll do the buying, take care of the financial side of things. But the day-to-day running of the store—that'll be your responsibility."

"Charlie, you can't be serious!" Sarah said. She did not know whether to laugh or cry. The thought of being back again amid the familiar sights and sounds of the store was such a surprise, such a delightfully unexpected surprise, that she did not know what to say or do. Simultaneously, she realized that to let Charlie handle the financial affairs of the store would be disaster. He was hopeless with money, although, like most of those who were, he thought himself frugal and well-ordered about financial matters. Well, she thought, perhaps I could bring him to see that. In time. Perhaps in time.

"It's . . . it's all such a surprise," she said. "What did Theo say?"

"I think he was glad to be shot of it," Charlie said. "He didn't act like a man whose heart was breaking, anyway."

"But . . . but where did you get the money, Charlie?"

"Ah," said Charlie, tapping the side of his nose and looking mysterious. "That'd be telling now, wouldn't it?"

"Gambling?" Sarah said. "You couldn't win that much gambling."

"Well, as to that, I wouldn't be sure," Charlie said, forgiving himself what was, after all, only half a lie. "For it is a gamble of sorts, what I did."

"How much?" Sarah said.

"Ach, there's no need for you to bother yourself about

that," Charlie told her, going across the room and sniffing at the saucepan bubbling on the range. "What's there to eat?"

"I've made a stew," Sarah said. "Lamb stew."

"Smells good," Charlie said with a grin. "You going to feed me?"

"Now? It's not even four o'clock."

"I know that," Charlie said. "It's this being a property owner. Gives a fellow an appetite."

Sarah smiled and went across to the cupboard for plates. Charlie hadn't been in such good spirits for a long time. Perhaps it would all work out well after all. Maybe the responsibility of running the store would change him. Maybe from now on everything would be better. She didn't really believe it, but oh, she wanted to.

"Besides," Charlie said, "I've got to go out."

"Oh," she said. "Where to?" She could have bitten off her tongue the moment the words left her mouth.

"Out," Charlie said, anger stiffening his face. "Don't always be checking up on me, Sarah. We're not in a courtroom."

"I . . . I only—"

"You only what? You only wanted to whine again, you mean? 'Don't drink too much, Charlie.' 'Don't be reckless at the tables, Charlie.' 'What time will you be home, Charlie?' God damn it, Sarah, you're not my keeper!"

"Sorry," Sarah said. "I'm sorry, Charlie."

"You're always sorry," Charlie said.

The closed carriage came to a stop at the corner of Market and Powell Street. Passers-by hurrying along the sidewalks took little notice of it, or of the woman in dark clothes; her face concealed by a veil, who stepped across and climbed inside. The driver gigged the two bay horses into the stream of vehicles going along Market, and turned down Fourth Street towards the Mission Road. Inside, behind the lowered blinds, Sarah lifted her veil and Theo kissed her. They clung to each other as if drawing strength from one another.

They had been meeting like this for weeks now, and Sarah was lost in a maze of conflicting emotions which

she did not know how to handle. She felt keenly her betrayal of Charlie in seeing Theo, but she knew she needed him, needed his tenderness and love even when they warred with her loyalty towards and sympathy for Charlie.

He had started out so full of enthusiasm and energy. There had been a "grand reopening" with banners and signs proclaiming the change in management. All of Sarah's old friends had come to see her, many of them men who had been her customers when they were miners. Some of them were staying on to work for the big companies, others were going back to where they had come from to try and pick up the threads of their old lives.

Sarah threw herself into work and more work. It was like a draft of ice-cold water in the desert of her recent life, and the old, familiar, musty smells of cheese and leather intoxicated her. Everything went well for two months, and then, on February 18, 1855, the steamer *Oregon* sailed into harbor with the news that the great St. Louis banking firm of Page, Bacon & Co. had failed. By the following Friday every one of San Francisco's forty-two banking firms had closed its doors. It was unbelievable: the Miner's Exchange, Adams & Co., even Wells, Fargo could not meet their obligations, and when they closed everything else in the city stopped dead in its tracks, too. No business could be done, and so the brothels and the saloons raked it in in old Sydney Town and North Beach. Then, one by one, the smaller businesses started to go under; men who had spent four, five, six years getting established saw their work blown away as by a huge wind. A hundred of them, two hundred, and then three: there seemed to be no end to it. Less than half of the banks would ever reopen their doors, they said. Charlie lost heart early, and began to drink heavily.

"Bastards," he would mutter in his sleep. "Can't beata bastards."

Sarah was afraid, afraid for Charlie and even more afraid for Theo, because Charlie now believed that Theo had known of the impending depression and sold him the store knowing it, leaving Charlie holding the baby. Real-estate prices had dropped so low that he would not even realize a quarter of its worth if he sold the building. Drunk,

he blurted out the truth of the business arrangement with Theo, that the loan was in her name. Sarah could not believe what Charlie had done, or that Theo would ever have agreed to such an arrangement. As soon as she was able she went to see him.

"Of course I did it," he said. "For you, I did it for you. I don't care about money. I'd give it to you if I could, and everything else I have."

"Why?" she asked. "Why have you put me in this position, Theo? Don't you see how it would look if people knew?"

"I don't care about that," he said.

"Oh Theo," she sighed. "Why do you want to do all this for me? Why not some other woman? I'm not beautiful. I can't give you anything you don't already have. Why does it have to be me?"

"You know that, Sarah," he said. "You've known for a time."

"I can't love you, Theo," she said. "I am married to Charlie."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes, I do," Sarah said, wondering how she could ever make Theo see that she loved Charlie differently, loved him because he needed her and would be lost without her, because it was simply not in her soul or body to desert him.

"Like this?" Theo said fiercely. He was angry and she had never seen him angry before. He rose from the chair and swept her into his arms. She might as well have tried to resist a hurricane. He held her as if he would never release her, showering her face with kisses, his broad, strong hands crushing her body against his.

"Is this how you love him?" he muttered. "Or, this . . . or this?"

"Theo," she said, pushing ineffectually against his grip. "Let me go! Theo, let me go!"

"No," he growled. "Not this time."

He kissed her again and then again, and again until her mind was empty, until the strength went out of her arms, until the taut muscles at the base of her neck relaxed and her head drooped. Somewhere inside herself she knew that she must stop now and let this go no further, but she

wanted to be powerless, she wanted to be swept along on the tide of her own feelings. She wanted him just as much as he wanted her, perhaps more in a different way. It wouldn't matter, she thought, it wouldn't matter.

"Sarah," he whispered. "Stay with me."

"I can't," she said. "I mustn't."

"Don't go back to him. Stay with me."

"No, Theo. I—"

"You want me. I know you do."

"Yes," she whispered, finally admitting it to him, to herself, glad at last to be telling the truth. "Yes."

"Then stay."

"No," she said. "I can't let it happen, Theo."

"You're afraid he might find out?"

"No," she said. "I'm afraid because I could never go back. And I won't do that to him."

"You still love him? In spite of everything?"

"How could I not love him, Theo? He has been part of my life for all these years. In a way I love him more than I love you. You are strong: he is not. You have been successful, he has failed. He needs someone. You don't need anybody."

"I need you, Sarah," Theo said.

"You don't," she said. "You don't need me at all."

"I want to see you all the time," he said. "My days are empty if I don't share them with you. I want to touch you, hold you, love you. I want to live the rest of my life, such as it may be, with you. Doesn't that mean anything to you at all?"

"More than you know," Sarah said softly.

"Then you love me too?"

"Theo," she said. "Don't ever ask me to say it. If I tell you that I love you, I am committed to you for ever. That's the kind of woman I am."

"And that's how I want it to be," he said. "Say it."

"No, my dearest," Sarah said, smiling. She touched his face gently with her hand, as if pacifying a child awakened by a bad dream. "Telling me that you love me does not make all the problems disappear. It does not alter anything. We are still who we are, surrounded by the people who make us who we are. Telling me you love me is not

a panacea. The world won't go away just because you say it."

"I don't understand you, Sarah," Theo said.

"Yes you do," she replied. "Now: I want to ask you something."

She drew away from him, holding his hands in her own. There was a fine trembling in them and she was surprised: it was like some magnetic force within him. For the first time he had made her aware of his passion, and she was awed by it. She had never had any experience of passion, especially passion allied to gentleness and strength. It would all be so easy, she thought. All I have to do is say three words and he would take care of everything and nothing else would matter.

"I want you to promise to be my dearest friend," she said. "I want you to promise that while Charlie lives you will never again speak the words you spoke to me today."

"Ah, girl," he said. "You ask a lot." She was astonished to see tears in his eyes: she had not expected that. Theo nodded. "I'll agree," he said. "On one condition. I must see you sometimes, Sarah. I can't face not seeing you, somehow, somewhere."

"A life of stolen minutes, Theo?" she said. "Is that what you want?"

"It's not what I want," he said. "But if it has to be, I'll take it."

Her heart swelled; somehow Theo always found the words to touch her heart as tangibly as if he had laid his hand upon it. She knew now that she loved him. She knew also that she did not want to pay the price of doing so.

"We shall see," she had said then, and they parted. That had been in March 1855. Now it was September, and the chill of the evenings came early. They met perhaps once a week, not to any schedule or set pattern. Theo would visit the store; they would talk, he would ask a thousand questions with his eyes and she reply with hers. Both of them fondly imagined that nobody knew what they were doing. In fact their love was so obvious, and shone from them so clearly when they were together, that a blind man could have warmed his hands on it. The only man who

seemed unaware of their relationship was Charlie Malone.

"I love him, Theo," Sarah was saying as the carriage swayed along the sandy road towards the Mission Dolores. "I can't desert him."

"You must," Theo said. "He's through. Sarah. He'll take you down with him if you stay."

"No," she said. "I can't believe that."

"He's borrowed all over town against the store," Theo told her. "Far more than he could get for it lock, stock and barrel. He's also borrowed against the house. I'd say he's in debt to the tune of fifteen or twenty thousand, Sarah, and that's not counting any notes the gamblers might have."

"Oh my God," she whispered. "What shall I do?"

"I could buy him out, I suppose," Theo said. "That might stave off the inevitable."

"He'd never sell to you, Theo," she said. "Least of all to you."

"Does he hate me that much?"

"No," she said. "It's—it would just be pride."

"Because of us?"

"No," Sarah said. "He doesn't know about us."

"I sometimes wish he did," Theo said.

"No you don't," Sarah smiled. "You don't wish that at all. You know what would happen if he did."

"Well," Theo said. "At least it would be out in the open."

"And one of you dead," Sarah said. Her body went cold at the thought of either of them hurting the other. They had been friends once, until she had come between them.

"Let's not talk of such depressing things," Theo said. "Look, my brother has sent a photograph of his son. My nephew, Hartwell."

"Is that Ezra's wife?"

"Yes, that's Jane. Jenny, Ez calls her."

Jane Carver's face was . . . wistful, Sarah decided. Theo had told her Jane was not very strong since the baby had been born, and she was expecting a second the following summer.

"Ez says he'd just as soon have another son," Theo said. "One for the law and one for politics, he says."

Sarah smiled at the vanity. She had met Ezra Carver when he came out to California and had been astonished at the difference between the two brothers. Where Theo was kind, Ezra was harsh. Theo had compassion, Ezra none. In eastern business circles Charlie told her they called Ezra Carver "the Back Bay Bastard." She had wondered why there was such a difference between them, and asked Charlie: it gave her a reason to talk about Theo, and she liked the secret knowledge that he was hers, liked the admiration she heard when men talked about him.

"Theo has talent and some ability, even," Charlie said. "But he hasn't got the killer instinct. He'll never be half as rich as his brother, nor a quarter as powerful."

"He'll be happy, though," Sarah said. "Ezra Carver won't."

"My dear Sarah," Charlie said loftily. "People like Ezra Carver never stop to wonder whether they're happy or not."

Sarah wondered about Jane Terrill. What sort of woman married a man like Ezra Carver? Theo said she was frail. That meant, in woman's language, that she was narrow-hipped and slender, the kind who suffered all the agony at childbearing time. She would probably suffer it silently, and Ezra Carver would never even be aware of it.

"There's more," Theo said.

"More news?"

"I'm going to start up a newspaper," he said.

"A newspaper? But Theo, you're not a journalist."

"Not write it, Sarah," he said. "Buy it."

"And who will run it? What will you call it? When will you begin to publish it?"

"One question at a time," Theo laughed, holding up his hands in mock self-defense. "I'll tell you over dinner."

"Dinner?" she said. "We mustn't—"

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "We're not going to a restaurant."

"Theo, we can't go to a private home together. People will—"

"Not these people," he said firmly.

"Theo!" she said. "Whose home are we going to, you must tell me!"

Theo smiled and rapped on the ceiling of the coach. The driver opened the hatch, letting in a swirl of cold air that smelled of sea and fog.

"Yassah?" he said, eyes gleaming in the darkness.

"Ezekiel," Theo said. "Take us to the McAllisters!"

There were just the four of them: Hall and Louisa McAllister, Theo and Sarah. Louisa had greeted Sarah like a long lost daughter. There had been tears and embraces, and in the warmth of such affection and happiness Sarah bloomed like a rose. It was quite like old times, sitting again at the long walnut table with its pristine napkins and glittering crystal. She realized how much she had missed all this, the dear counsel of Louisa, the crusty pomposities of Hall. The meal was a great success.

"I met a fellow named James King," Theo was saying. "He was in the banking business before Black Friday wiped him out. He holds his colleagues and their political pals to blame for that, and is determined to expose them."

"He wants to start a newspaper," Sarah said, "with Theo backing it."

"Hm," Hall said, frowning and sticking out his lower lip. "Has he been out here long?"

"Before all of us," Theo smiled. "He came out in 'forty-eight. Knows the country, knows the people. And he's not afraid to say what he thinks about either."

"Think I may know the fellow," Hall said. "Isn't he the one who calls himself King of William or some such thing?"

"That's him," Theo said.

"What a strange thing to do!" Louisa said. "He is not a royal, is he?"

"Heavens, no!" Sarah smiled. "He says he got fed up being mixed up with all the other James Kings when he was a young man in Washington."

"Added 'son of William' to his name," Theo added, "which in turn got shortened. Now everyone calls him James King of William."

"Where's he from?" Hall asked. Hall always wanted to know where people were from.

"Georgetown," Theo said. "I think his people were quite well off."

"Hm," Hall said again, meaning, I haven't seen any proof of that. He was a lawyer first, foremost and always, "And you intend to back him in this newspaper thing?"

"I believe I will," Theo said. "I think he should have his chance at Broderick and that gang at City Hall."

"I didn't know you felt so strongly about our David," Hall smiled.

"Don't," Theo said. "It's bribery and corruption I feel strongly about!"

"Bravo, Theo!" Louisa said. "Now, Hall, what have you to say?"

Sarah had to smile. Hall McAllister was a fine lawyer and a gentleman of distinction, but he was ponderously slow on the uptake, and Louisa loved nothing better than to tease him this way. It was almost as if she was saying, come along now, faster, faster.

"We're all against that," Hall said. "Your man King too, I suppose."

"Oh yes," Theo said. "Especially King."

"We can use men like that in San Francisco," Hall said.

"You make it sound as if you own the city," Louisa smiled.

"If I did, I doubt it would have its present troubles," Hall said.

"I'm sure it would not, my dear," Louisa replied. "I have no doubt you would do something about the dreadful things one sees downtown these days."

"Aye," Theo said. "It's as bad now as ever it was. Worse, even."

"Full of thieves and blackguards!" Hall said. "Everywhere you go!"

"Why, only the other day—" Theo began, when Louisa smiled and rose from her chair.

"I think we will leave you to your cigars, Theo," she said. "Sarah and I have a lot of gossiping to catch up on."

Hall looked across the table at Theo and smiled, and they stood as Sarah and Louisa went out of the room and closed the doors quietly behind them.

"Louisa was sparing your blushes, Theo," Hall smiled.

"I'd wager she knows more about what sins the citizens of San Francisco are indulging in than any dozen councilmen in City Hall."

"No bet, my friend," Theo smiled.

"They think we know nothing of what goes on in the streets of the city," Louisa said to Sarah as they sat down in the drawing-room. "I'd wager I know more than Hall any day of the week."

"So would I," Sarah agreed, smiling.

"Do you think Theo is serious about this newspaper business, child?"

"Oh, I'm sure he is," Sarah said.

"He is treading on dangerous ground, you know."

"How do you mean?"

"Sarah, my dear, San Francisco is still producing gold, but these days no one has to dig for it. The city may have closed down all but three of the gambling houses, but all that has succeeded in doing is driving the games into the parlour-houses."

"Those places!" Sarah said with a shudder.

"They are a fact of life, my dear," Louisa said. "It's no use burying our heads in the sand and pretending they are not there. I doubt there is one neighborhood left in the city where one could take a family to live secure in the knowledge that there was not such a house on the same block or just around the corner. It's outrageous, but it is a fact. There are supposed to be laws against prostitution, but they are not enforced—except against the colored girls, the Mexicans, the Chileños, and the Chinese. Even then, there is plenty of bribery and buying off. I know all about it. The girls tell me."

"You talk to them?" Sarah said, awed by Louisa's daring.

"How else would we find out what is happening down there in the dives?" Louisa said. "Someone has to do something."

"That's what King says," Sarah observed thoughtfully. "He says the girls are harmless fools. It is the men who live off them, and the men who live off those men, whom he wishes to attack."

"Yes," Louisa said. "And that is why he is on dangerous ground, my dear, and Theo with him."

"But Theo will not run the newspaper, King will do that."

"The men we're talking about aren't fools, Sarah," Louisa said. "They will not mistake the monkey for the organ grinder."

"Perhaps not," Sarah said. "Theo says that the city needs to know the truth."

"He may be right," Louisa said. "Although I wonder whether the city cares one way or the other. When does he propose to begin publishing his paper—what's it called?"

"The *Evening Bulletin*," Sarah said. "In October, I believe."

"Then we shall see what we have to see," said Louisa. "Now what of yourself? How is everything? I heard your husband was not doing too well." Hall had actually said Charlie Malone was on the skids, and ten thousand in debt to the gambler Charles Cora to boot. Louisa did not know whether Theo would have told Sarah this, but she doubted it.

"He is doing very badly," Sarah said, her chin coming up. "And taking it worse. It . . . I . . . it's hard to know how to help him."

"Do you still want to?"

"Yes, oh yes," Sarah said. "I hate to see him so unhappy, so distressed, and I rack my brain to think of some way, any way, I could help. But there is no way. He needs money, but I know in my heart that even if he got it he would gamble it away. He spends all his time with that gambler—"

"Cora, you mean?"

"Yes," Sarah said, "Charles Cora."

"A bad lot," Louisa said. "Hall had to check up on him at one time. Do you know the story?"

"No," Sarah said. "Tell me."

"He is from Genoa," Louisa said. "In Italy. Came to America as a child, and became a riverboat gambler before he was twenty. He met up with the woman, his consort—"

"Bella Cora," Sarah said. "They say she is beautiful."

"And evil," Louisa added. "They also say she had a house of ill-fame in New Orleans, that Cora became her protector there. They came out here together late in eighteen forty-nine on the *California*. There was some bad trouble even then, aboard ship. They were up country for a while, Marysville, Sacramento, Shasta, Sonora. He gambled for a living. She—well, you know what she is."

"Yes," Sarah said. She did not add that Charlie always spoke of Bella Cora as if she were a living monument of what a woman should be.

"Both of them came to San Francisco at the beginning of 1852," Louisa said. "The woman is a scandal, an absolute scandal. Shameless and brazen, and nobody does anything about it."

"Perhaps James King of William will," Sarah said.

"Perhaps so," Louisa said.

There was so much more they could have said to each other, so much that Sarah wanted to tell Louisa and could not, so much that Louisa wanted to ask Sarah and would not. They sat in silence gazing at the flickering fire in the hearth until Theo and Hall joined them.

"Have another," Charlie said.

"Well," Cora said, "I don't mind if I do."

He was taller than Charlie, with coal-black hair and swarthy skin. His moustache was so full that it hung over his lips, and his forehead was low over deep, dark eyes. They said that women found Cora good-looking, although Charlie didn't see it. Cora himself didn't give a damn. He had one of the handsomest women in San Francisco for a mistress. Any man who had Bella Ryan Cora as his lady-love had all the woman he could handle. A brunette with hazel eyes and the skin of a baby, Bella Cora was twenty-seven. Her house on Pike Street was frequented by the very cream of the city's political and social lions.

Charlie and Cora were standing at the bar of the Blue Wing, a saloon on Montgomery Street. It was mid-afternoon, but Charlie was in no hurry at all to leave. In the last few months he had grown to hate the store, hate the smell of it and the look of it. It was a reminder of his own failure, made even less inviting by the fact that the moment he stuck his head round the door they all came running to him with their problems. The clerks always had queries, the customers questions about things ordered, and Sarah—Sarah with bills and bills and bills to be paid. To hell with them all, he thought, and tossed back the whisky.

"You got a game going tonight, Charles?" he asked Cora. People only called Cora Charlie behind his back. The gambler insisted on being called by his full name, and

Bella would give any man who didn't do it the sharp edge of her tongue. Which, as Charlie knew from personal experience, cut like a razor. Bella didn't at all mind making the most intimate details about a man public if she felt in a mood to cut him down to size.

"Yes," said Cora languidly. "At McCabe's place. Why?"

"Thought I might sit in," Charlie said offhandedly.

"Like hell," Cora said without emphasis. "Your credit is getting pretty thin, Malone."

"I'll be all right," Charlie blustered. "Just a sticky patch."

"Sure," Cora said. His voice contained the softest hint of a Southern accent. He said the word like a man who has not believed anything anyone has told him since he was seven years old.

"I will, Charles," Charlie said. "You can rely on me."

"Bring cash," Cora said. "And you're in. Otherwise, not a chance." He was as genuinely offhand as Charlie had unsuccessfully tried to be.

"Aw, come on, Charles, give me a break."

"Cash, Malone," Cora said inexorably. He turned, dismissing Charlie. An ill-clad man shuffled up and tugged at his elbow. Cora bent to listen to what the old man was saying.

"What?" he said. "Oh Christ, not again!"

"What is it, Charles?" a man on his right asked.

"It's that damned drunk Richardson," Cora said, his tone vexed.

Everybody knew about Cora's feud with Bill Richardson, the United States marshal for the northern district of California. He was married to one of the snottiest women in San Francisco, Richardson was, and that was about as snotty-nosed as they came. He had taken his wife to the opening of Maguire's new theater, the American, where the Ravel family troupe was presenting *Nicodemus*. They had sat, without knowing it, in seats directly below the box occupied by Charles and Bella Cora. Everyone in the pit was saluting Bella, or winking at her, or calling greetings only just this side of lusty, and Mrs. Richardson took umbrage. She knew who Bella was—what decent woman in the city did not? She had already had one collision with

her when she had thrown a grand party earlier in the year, only to find that none of the distinguished gentlemen she'd invited had turned up—they were all at one of Bella's twice-yearly soirées in the bagnio on Pike Street. Mrs. Richardson professed herself afraid that a woman friend who was with her and her husband might think the endearments floating up from below were addressed to her, and bade her husband see to it that Cora and his paramour were immediately ejected. General Richardson tried, and he tried at the top of his voice; but the manager refused to eject the Coras, who had done nothing untoward. Locals noted that Tom Maguire was not unmindful of the fact that Charles Cora was quite likely to blow a hole through him, with the Deringer everyone knew the gambler carried, if he felt that either he or Bella had been slighted. Disposition like a shark everyone said; and about as predictable.

The Richardsons left the theater after some heated words with Cora and the brazen Bella, who laughed in Mrs. Richardson's mortified face. The following day the two men met on the street outside the Cosmopolitan Saloon and again exchanged insults. The same evening there were more insults after a drinking session in which they appeared to have settled their differences. Richardson left the saloon but was heard to say he planned to go back inside and slap Cora's face.

"Take him home," Cora laughed. "I wouldn't pull a gun on the poor drunken bastard!"

So they led the fuming, spluttering and quite humiliated General Richardson away, and everyone assumed the whole thing was finished. Now he was outside the Blue Wing and asking for Cora.

"I wonder what the old fool wants now?" Cora said aloud. He pushed through the crowd of curious bystanders and went out into the street. Richardson was waiting over on the shady side, and he looked as if he had been drinking. Cora crossed the busy street and spoke to the older man. Richardson nodded, and they turned down Clay Street towards Leidesdorff. Charlie decided to go down after them and see what happened. He hurried out of the Blue Wing and turned into Clay. As he did so he heard

the sound of a shot. Just ahead of him Charles Cora was holding Bill Richardson against the wall of a building, a smoking Deringer in his hand. He stepped back, letting go of the older man. Richardson slumped to the ground.

Charlie ran to where Cora was standing. The gambler looked cool and unconcerned. He watched Charlie bend over Richardson's body.

"Jesus, Cora, you've killed him!" Charlie said.

"He was asking for it," Cora hissed. "Get the boys. Get help, Malone. I'll see you right!"

Charlie nodded and ran as the cry of Cora's name went up along the street. He saw James Estell come out of one of the saloons and pin Cora's arms. The gambler sneered, unresisting. A crowd was starting to gather and Charlie heard someone shout, "Hang him! Hang the bastard!" He ran as fast as he could back to the Cosmopolitan.

"Corner of Leidesdorff!" he yelled. "Quick, boys! They're gonna hang Cora!"

Men tumbled out of the place and ran down Clay Street to where the milling crowd was making it impossible for General Estell to get Cora away. Someone had sent for a doctor, who was bending over the body of Bill Richardson. There was a thin pool of blood on the sidewalk. Cora looked a little dishevelled, nothing more.

After about ten minutes police came running and Cora was hustled away.

"Hang the bastard!" someone shouted again, and the cry was again taken up. Clay Street was jammed solid with men shouting and demanding that Cora be hanged. They marched in a solid phalanx towards the station house. Outside the Oriental, on the corner where Bush Street met Market and Battery, Sam Brannan climbed up on a wooden soapbox and started yelling at the crowd to go down to the jail and get Cora.

"Drag him out of there," Brannan shouted. "Bring him out and hang him. We've had all we'll take of this!"

A quartet of policemen rushed up and pushed through the crowd, pulling Brannan down off his perch and dragging him away, surrounded by a jeering mob. The mob was like a powder keg, Charlie thought. If anyone makes a spark, it'll blow up in our faces.

Fifty armed men were set to guard the jail; frustrated, the mob patrolled the streets most of the evening. It was three in the morning before the crowds started to thin out and peace returned to the downtown district.

The following day every newspaper in California came out in condemnation of Cora for the murder of Bill Richardson. None spoke more strongly than the new editor of the *Evening Bulletin*, James King. He had a virulent, exhortative style, and he did not mince a single word. "Look well to the jury!" he bid his readers, warning them that Cora's friends would try to pack it. "If the jury is packed, either hang the sheriff or drive him out of town and make him resign!"

"God in heaven," Charlie exclaimed as he read it aloud at the breakfast table. "The man's trying to get Cora lynched!"

"Hanged," Sarah said. "And deservedly, from what I hear."

"Listen to this," Charlie said, ignoring her remark. "If Mr. Sheriff Scannell does not remove Billy Mulligan from his present post as keeper of the county jail and Mulligan lets Cora escape, hang Billy Mulligan and if necessary to get rid of the sheriff, hang him—hang the sheriff! Why, the man's nothing but a lunatic!"

"To call a murderer by his right name?" Sarah said. "To say that Mulligan and Scannell are corrupt—what's lunatic about that?"

"Ach," Charlie said, throwing the paper down on the table and getting up. What did she know about men like Billy Mulligan and Dave Scannell, men like Charles Cora? None of her fine and fancy friends would have carried Charlie Malone's notes as long as Cora had, or stood him as many fine meals as Dave Scannell. No, her crowd would have had him hauled in front of a magistrate long since and jailed for debt. He shrugged into his coat.

"Where are you going?" Sarah said, not really expecting an answer. It was just as well, for she did not get one.

James King's editorials did not let up on Cora, and his extraordinary fervor kept the city in a ferment. Charles Cora was arraigned for trial within two months of his

arrest—unheard-of speed for the San Francisco courts. Meanwhile, Bella had not wasted any time. She summoned Colonel E. D. Baker, one of the city's most prominent lawyers, to her home, and asked him to lead Cora's defense. Baker was an Englishman with a penchant for the gambling tables. Bella knew he was in a hole and offered him thirty thousand dollars to handle her man's case. Charlie watched with eyes like saucers as Bella calmly counted out fifteen thousand dollars in gold coin as a down payment.

"Bella, I don't think I can get Charles out of this," Baker said. "I've spoken to Jim Casey down at the jail, and he says Charles had the murder weapon in his pocket. He'll go before the grand jury as sure as tomorrow is Friday."

"Do you think I give a damn about all that?" Bella screeched. "Get him out of it! I'm not paying you this kind of money to see him hanged!"

"I'd rather decline, Bella," Baker said, "if you don't mind."

"Mind, you old goat?" Bella snapped. "I'll break your reputation in this town into so many pieces you'll never put it together again! I'll tell stories about you that will curl the hair of every decent man and woman in the state. Mind? Of course I don't mind. Turn me down and be damned, you pettifogging old fart!"

"Well," Baker said dubiously. He had no doubt that Bella would do exactly what she threatened. His eyes flickered over the pile of gold coins like the tongue of a snake. "Of course, I could reconsider . . ."

"Yes," Bella laughed, her contempt like a whip. "You could do that."

"All right," Baker said.

He snatched up the money into his hat as if he was afraid that it might suddenly grow legs and escape his grasping hands. He was gone before Charlie realized it. He turned to face the woman. Her eyes were like the vacant holes in a skull.

"Now you," she said, quietly venomous. "You've got work to do."

"Me?" Charlie said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Find Jim Casey," Bella snapped. "Tell him to get up here fast. Charles is going to need a lot more than the fifteen thousand I've given to that stupid old fool—twice, three times that much. We've got to raise it, and Jimmy is the boy who's going to do it. And you, Malone. You're going to help, too."

"Me?" Charlie said, dismay in his voice. "How can I help him?"

"I've got a special job for you, darling," Bella said. Her voice was like cream with a razor in it. "You are going to see your old partner, that damned Theodore Carver."

"Theo?" Charlie echoed.

"Tell him that I want to see him," she said. "Alone. Not here, he won't come to the house. Tell him I'll be in my carriage on Montgomery Street at three tomorrow afternoon. I'll stop at the corner of Market Street. Tell him to be there."

"He won't come, Bella," Charlie said. "He won't do it."

"He had better, Malone," Bella said. "Or I am going to call your debts—in public!"

"What?" Charlie said, paling under his tan. "You'd ruin me—just like that?"

"I'd do more than that for my man!" Bella hissed. "As you'll see. Now get out of here and do what I told you to do!"

The hatred in her eyes was like the deep, red glow of a coal fire, and Charlie could face it no longer. He turned tail and ran, and he did not stop running until he got to the office of James P. Casey, the city supervisor.

"What do you want?" Theo said.

He felt uncomfortable even speaking to the damned woman. Every head on the street was turned towards them. Bella Cora was probably one of the best-known women in San Francisco, and Theo knew that every man watching them thought that he was making an assignation with her. It turned his stomach. Not that she wasn't an attractive woman, if you liked them overblown and overdressed, overperfumed and overpowering. Her clothes were of the finest silk, her parasol obviously Parisian, everything she wore of the best possible quality. The

damned horses pulling her carriage were worth more than most men earned in a year, Theo thought irritably.

"I asked you what you wanted," he said impatiently. "I have business to attend to."

"None more important than this, Mr. Carver," the woman said. "Get in and sit down."

"I shall do no such thing," Theo said.

"I will say it only once more," Bella Cora said. "Get in and sit down or I will announce, at the top of my voice, right here on Montgomery Street, the details of your affair with Sarah Malone!"

Theo felt as if someone had punched him in the stomach. A sweeping feeling of nausea rose in his throat and for a moment his sight blurred. Then the sickness was swept away by a tide of anger so strong that he experienced for the first time in his life the unspeakable desire to kill. His hands clenched and as they did Bella Cora laughed. Her laughter was coarse and mannish.

"Yes, you'd probably love to throttle me, wouldn't you, Carver?" she said, her voice full of scorn. "Well, forget that. And get into this damned carriage!"

Theo took a deep breath and shook his head.

Bella Cora smiled and nodded, taking control of herself with visible effort.

"You've got sand," she said. "I like that in a man. You could do better than that little mouse, you know. I've got some girls who'd take care of you much better than your little—"

"If you were a man I would kill you here and now!" Theo said, his voice level and without anger. Bella Cora looked at him for a long, surprised moment, and then threw back her head and laughed aloud.

"Well, well, well," she said. "So it's true love, is it? That makes it even better. Now, my fine feathered friend, you listen to me, and listen well. I know it's you behind that firebrand little fool at the *Bulletin*. That's why he can afford to have his windows broken by the mob every day and replaced the next. That's how he carries on, because he has your money behind him. Well, Mr. High and Mighty Carver! He's not going to go on stirring up the

mob until they hang my man, not while I have breath in me to stop him!"

"Jim King writes as he sees fit," Theo told her.

"You make it possible for him to write at all!" Bella hissed. "And now you are going to stop him! Stop him, or as God is my judge, Carver, I will blazon your affair with Sarah Malone all over this city!"

"Would you do that?" Theo cried. "Would you stoop that low, madam?"

"Aye, and into the pits of hell itself!" Bella replied. "I'd ruin a dozen like you, a hundred like her, to save my Charles. So mark what I say, Carver! Stop King and stop him now, or the world will know of your adultery!"

"Even if I wanted to, I couldn't stop King," Theo told her. "Charles Cora is a cold-blooded murderer and deserves to hang. How can you pretend it is otherwise?"

"Do you think I care about that?" Bella said. "I care only for him! Don't you understand, you fool? Only for him!"

Theo did understand, and for a moment pity touched his heart. The woman was a slut, but her love for Cora was real enough.

"Hire the best lawyers you can get, madam," he said. "For they are the only hope you have."

"You refuse me?" Bella Cora screeched, standing up in her carriage. Theo did not answer; he walked resolutely on along Market Street towards the store at the foot of Kearney, willing himself not to look back. He feigned not to notice the stares of passers-by who could hear Bella Cora screaming vituperation after his retreating back. He had the strangest feeling of not being a part of it at all. All he was aware of was his need to get to the store, to tell Sarah what had happened before anyone else could. He did not know what to do or what to say to her, but he knew that if they were together it would be all right.

"Damn your soul to hell, Theodore Carver!" Bella Cora screamed as her coachman turned the carriage in Market Street. "Damn you, you're finished! Do you hear me, Carver? You're a dead man, dead man, dead, dead, dead!"

Her voice faded into the traffic noise and then was gone.

Charles Cora's trial began on January 3, 1856. During the week that the jury was being selected Bella busied herself trying to suborn witnesses and bribe prospective jurymen. It was useless. Testimony began on the ninth, and the defense instructed her to stay away from the court altogether if she wanted Cora to have a dog's chance. So Bella concerned herself with making sure her man had clean linen and decent food and a supply of tobacco, while Cora sat through the five days it took to listen to all the testimony, impassive in his pleated shirt and figured brocade vest, fine broadcloth suit and spotless kid gloves. He chewed tobacco nervously, his face melancholy and his gaze turned inward as the prosecution lawyers argued that it was not Cora who was on trial here, not even Cora and his mistress, but the very city of San Francisco itself, its manners and morals and way of life. Was it to be a city where decent people could live upright lives without fear, or a place where animals like Cora could murder respectable citizens without let or hindrance? Was San Francisco entering a dark age, or approaching a renaissance? Witnesses came and went; the details of Richardson's murder were raked over and over a thousand times. When Colonel Baker attempted to introduce character witnesses in Cora's defense, the prosecutor bade the jury ignore every word they said.

"They are all patrons of Bella Cora's establishment!" Mr. Byrne announced in ringing tones. "Therefore, by definition they are all liars and cheats. They lie to their families, their friends, and to themselves. Need you wonder whether they would lie to you to protect their reputations?"

It was a telling point. Not a few of the witnesses cast anxious glances towards the public galleries where their wives were sitting scarlet faced.

On the morning of January 15th Cora's defense attorney rose to make his closing speech. Baker was a courtly, paternal-looking man of forty-five with prematurely gray hair. He spoke at length about the fairness of the American judicial system, the honor and integrity of the judge, the prosecuting attorneys and the jurymen, ignoring audible comments from the well of the court that his oratory

was as inflated as his rumored fee. Baker went on to speak of Cora, and of the victim, his widow, his orphaned children. Slowly, and with patient guile, he led the jury towards the conclusion that he wished them to make: that while Cora was no saint, Billy Richardson had been a violent, quarrelsome drunk.

"There is no wretch so steeped in all the agonies of vice and crime that I would not have a heart to listen to his cry and a tongue to speak in his defense," Baker said, "though around his head all the wrath of public opinion should gather and rage and roar and roll, as the ocean rolls against the rock! If I ever forget, if I ever deny the highest duty to my profession, may God palsy this arm and hush my voice for ever!"

He held up his right arm, acknowledging with a small bow the burst of cheers which greeted his words, and continuing to speak even as the judge pounded on the bench with his gavel for silence.

"I will now proceed to grapple with the great bugbear of the case," Baker said. "The complaint on their side is that Bella Cora has tampered with the witnesses. Mr. Byrne has chosen to declare that the line of defense was concocted in a place which he has been pleased to designate as a haunt of sensuality!" An audible hiss of multiple indrawn breaths greeted those shocking words, and several people in the audience shouted "Shame!" but Baker ignored them.

"In plain English, Bella is helping her friend as much as she can. In the Lord's name, who else should help him? Who else is there whose duty it is to help him? If it were not for her he would not have a friend on earth. This howling, raging public opinion would banish every friend, even every man who once lived near him. It is a woman of base profession, of more than easy virtue, of malign frame in a degraded caste—it is one poor, feeble, weak and, if you like it, wicked woman—to her alone he owes his ability to employ counsel to present his defense! What we want to know is—what have they against that? What we want to know is—why don't they admire it?"

He paused for effect; the silence in the courtroom was

almost tangible. Baker was making friends for Cora but in doing so he was losing his own at a prodigious rate. Nobody minded that what he said was true. Everybody minded desperately that he was saying it. Now Baker spoke into the silence, shocking his audience even further.

"The history of this case is that this man and this woman have formed a mutual attraction not sanctioned, if you like, by the rites of the Church. It is but a trust in each other, a devotion to the last, amid all the dangers of the dungeon and all the terrors of the scaffold. They were bound together by a tie which angels might not blush to approve."

Once again there was the audible sound of indrawn breath. The lawyer was speaking openly of things no gentlemen ever discussed. Not a few of the men in the well of the court were muttering about horsewhips and tar and feathers. What damned hypocrites we are, Theo thought, as Baker again addressed the court. He proposed then that the sinfulness of Bella's life was outweighed by her faithfulness to Cora. She might have gone further than she ought in trying to save him, Baker said, but his answer to those who would condemn her for that was to "remember Magdalene!" It was hard to conceive of Bella as the Magdalene, Theo thought, remembering the poison in her eyes as she had promised to ruin him.

"My task is performed," Baker said in conclusion. "In the name of our common humanity, in the name of Him who died for that humanity, by the remembrance of your mothers and fathers, by your respect and admiration for women, the nearest and dearest ties that we can feel, by your consciousness of your own imperfections, I adjure you to consider in mercy! And, as you deal with the prisoner, so may the common Father of us all deal with you. So may the prayers of the mother whose heart yet yearns towards him reach you. So may his future life evince the sincerity of his repentance in the solitude of the jail. So may you be properous. And so may you answer for your judgement on that great day when you and the prisoner at the bar shall alike stand up to answer for all the deeds done in the body!"

It was a masterly speech, masterfully concluded, and nothing that Byrne or the rest of the prosecuting attorneys could do afterwards interested the audience or—it seemed—the jury. They retired, and stayed out for forty-one hours, during which time bets were being placed on the odds-on likelihood that they would acquit Cora. Then came the bombshell: the jury was hung, and could not reach a verdict. The judge had no alternative but to order a new trial and remand Cora into custody. The wiseacres tapped the sides of their noses and allowed they wouldn't want to hang upside down until the new trial was held.

James King, the shrewd editor of the *Evening Bulletin*, knew a fix when he saw one, and he hastened back to his office at the conclusion of the proceedings. Pulling a pad of ruled yellow legal foolscap and his favorite pen towards him, King began to write.

"Rejoice, Ye Gamblers and Harlots! Rejoice with exceeding gladness!" he scribbled, his writing slanted with haste and the intensity of his anger.

"I'll show them," he muttered, as his pen scratched across the paper time and again. "Show them all!" He was finished within an hour, setting the type by hand almost immediately. His leader condemned the jury, the system and implicitly—Charles Cora himself. It was more than enough to enrage Bella Ryan Cora, and if that had been King's intention it succeeded admirably. Less than half an hour after Bella had flung the crumpled *Bulletin* into the fireplace of her salon in the Pike Street house, Charlie Malone came hurrying up the steps. He was shown in and told to sit and listen in silence. He left fifteen minutes later; his face that of a man who would kill for pennies.

It had been a wonderful evening. Hall and Louisa had managed at long last to persuade Caroline Chapman to join them for dinner at the house on Stockton Street. The famous actress and her equally famous brother had regaled them all evening with stories of the theatre, reminiscences of actors and actresses and tours all across the nation, backstage gossip, and slightly risqué tales that had them wiping tears of laughter from their eyes.

Caroline was a slender woman with expressive brown eyes and beautiful hands, her voice mellifluous and soothing. When she learned of Sarah's amateur theatricals and love for Shakespeare her enthusiasm knew no bounds, and nothing would do but that Sarah "audition" for her. Flustered, flattered, surprised, Sarah spoke almost instinctively the first lines that came into her head:

Noblest of men, woo't die?
 Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
 In this dull world, which in thy absence is
 No better than a sty? O, see, my women,
 The crown o' the earth doth melt. My lord!
 O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
 The soldier's pole is fall'n; young boys and girls
 Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
 And there is nothing left remarkable
 Beneath the visiting moon.

There was a little silence as Sarah finished Cleopatra's speech, then Caroline and William Chapman exclaimed in delight and applauded enthusiastically until Hall and Louisa and Theo were perforce swept up in their enthusiasm.

"Oh, my dear girl, you spoke those lines as though you had lived them! You are an actress born! Have you ever thought of going on the stage, Sarah?"

Blushing and confused, Sarah made no reply, and Louisa stepped quickly in to conceal her shyness. "Why, of course she hasn't, Caro," she said smiling. "Sarah's like me—stagestruck, that's all."

"Well, my dear." Will Chapman smiled. "If you were ever to consider acting, I'd venture to say you'd do well at it. Perhaps even well enough to play Caroline's famous baby-casket scene."

"Oh, Bo," Caroline said with a smile. "Not that old chestnut again."

"The baby-casket scene?" Louisa asked. "From which play is that?"

"No play, my dear, but life itself," Will Chapman said. "Away back, a long time ago."

"Come, Bo, that's ancient history," Caroline said.

"Oh, do tell, do tell," Sarah begged, and Uncle Billy—everyone who knew Caroline's brother called him Uncle Billy—smiled and nodded.

"Playing the riverboats we were. A long time ago, I won't tell you how long. We'd go down the river on the boats, playing a town here, another there. Then we'd work our way back up the Wilderness Trace. Ever heard tell of it?"

"They call it the Devil's Backbone," Theo said. "Natchez to—"

"Nashville, you're right," Uncle Billy said. "Nothing but thieves and cutpurses and pagan Indians who'd slit your throat for a cupful of tanglefoot. It was on that vile excuse for a road that Captain Lewis was so foully murdered at Grinder's farm, and in earlier days saw the untimely end of Philip Nolan, the man without a country. Dark it is, and dank and gloomy, winding through impenetrable forests, lair of the cut-throat Mason, the bloody

Harpes! How many innocent travellers they killed and robbed no one will ever know!"

Sarah remembered the dark forests around Fort Des Moines. In the winter the trees dripped relentlessly, and mist lay low and close to the ground. The silence was enormous. If you walked alone among the trees at dusk, you could hear the wolves howl close by. She sighed; Uncle Billy was a born storyteller and listening to him brought back her childhood, the memory of being tucked warm beneath the downy quilt watching the reflected firelight flickering on the ceiling, and her father's voice telling the story of the silly foxes.

"I can picture it," she whispered.

"Then picture us in it," Caroline said. "Picture us riding at twilight, looking for a place to camp, worn out after a day on that awful trail with the tree stumps sticking up out of the ground like buried dinosaurs. Making our way slowly. And then, out of the mist, six horsemen appear—the most ferocious-looking bandits I have ever seen."

"Swarthy they were, and bearded," Uncle Billy said, relishing his words as another man would whisky. He had his audience in the palm of his hand, and, old pro that he was, he was playing them for all he was worth. "Their eyes held the very essence of evil, they had huge pistols stuck into their belts, bandoliers of ammunition around their shoulders. We watched them for signs that they intended to rob us, and we had not long to wait."

"How could you know they planned to rob you?" Louisa asked.

"Child, on a wilderness trail, as in a San Francisco home, there is an etiquette. A friendly approaching party passes you all together on one side, the right. If they separate to each side of you, then it's to be a robbery and naught else!"

"And they separated?"

"Indeed they did," Caroline said. "One to the right and another to the left, closing in behind us. Then another one to each side, while the remaining two blocked the trail ahead of us. The biggest of them pulled his horse around and yanked out a pistol. 'Hold!' he shouted, with a voice as coarse as a file. 'Hold, we're the Skeltons!'"

"Well," said Uncle Billy, "I looked at my brother George, and he at me, and George raised his voice. He had a voice that could shatter glass at twenty paces, George had, and he used every decibel of it now. 'Well,' he roared, 'and as to that, *we're the Chapmans!*' "

He stopped to sip his coffee, and Sarah tugged impatiently at his sleeve.

"Oh, go on, do!" she pleaded. "What happened then?"

"He's teasing you, Sarah," Caroline said with a smile. "He loves to pile on the agony. I'll tell you what happened. The bandit looked at Uncle George and then at Bo, and then at his own men. You could almost see what he was thinking. Who the devil were the Chapmans? 'Who are yez?' he shouted back at Uncle George. 'Where are yez bound for?' "

"'We're poor actors, sir,' George said. 'Returning home from a hard season in the South.'

"'Actors, b'Gawd!' shouted Skelton. 'Actors, is it? You hear that, boys? Real actors, all alive-oh!'

"'All alive to be sure,' Uncle George said. 'But penniless, sir, and anxious to return home to our friends who may feed and shelter us.'

"'Penniless, is it?' Skelton roared. 'Well, eff'n you're all so goddamned broke, how you expect to make your home? Answer me that 'n!'

"'Why, sir,' says Uncle George, 'we are strolling players. We play for our lodging and sing for our supper!'

"'As you may imagine, Skelton pondered on that for a while," Caroline went on, looking at her brother, who picked up his cue without hesitation.

"'Not too bright, Skelton wasn't," he said. "But cunning as a copperhead. He looked down at the ground and then up at the sky and then he scratched his head and spat a few. Then he gave a sort of a whoop and slapped his thigh, *thwop!* Like that. 'B'Gawd!' says he, 'that's what you'll do fer us. Git on over under that big tree thar, an' sing fer your supper. An' let me tell you suthin' else—us Skeltons is a mighty creetical audience, so you-all better be plumb damn good!'

Using his hands and body with mesmerising effect, he made them see the torchlit clearing in the forest, the actors

in their travel-stained clothing performing on the stump of one of the long-felled trees. He himself did the curse scenes from *Lear*, and the soliloquies from *The Merchant* and *Hamlet*. The whole cast did sketches from *Speed The Plough* which the bandits applauded uproariously. George and Will sang comic songs, and Caroline danced while Harry played the fiddle.

"An elf in the forest glades of Hades," Uncle Billy said. "I can see her now, as if it were but yesterday."

"Did they like you?" Hall asked.

"We needn't have feared," Caroline said. "Our 'audience' applauded us madly, stamping their feet, pounding each other on the back, whooping and shooting off their pistols. We allowed ourselves a moment of triumph—George had outwitted these clumsy oafs and no mistake, we thought. But no!"

"They weren't through with us yet," Uncle Billy grinned.

"Mercy!" Louisa exclaimed. "What now?"

"Well, now with elephantine gallantry, this Skelton came up to me," Caroline said. "He apologized, but said he would just have to look through our wagon anyway, to sort of satisfy his 'boys' that we had no gold. So he climbed into the wagon and started going through the trunks, shaking out the costumes and looking at them with awe. He danced about, putting on wigs and playing with the prop swords, playful as an idiot giant. And all the time getting closer and closer to the chest in which lay all our money!"

"Nine hundred dollars," Uncle Billy added theatrically. "Our receipts for the entire season!"

"Nine hundred dollars," Caroline repeated, "all concealed in the casket that we use for the scene in *The Merchant* when Portia must choose her suitor. I saw those huge hairy hands close on the lid, saw the apelike fingers fumble with the clasp—"

"And then?" Sarah gasped.

"And then I screamed like a banshee!" Caroline said, smiling. "'Oh, no, sir, no, I beg of you no!' I wailed. 'I beg you please, please, not that, do not despoil that casket!'"

"Well, that there poor feller dropped that box like it had suddenly turned red-hot," Uncle Billy cackled. "He

skittered back while Caroline collapsed in a swoon across it, with me rushing to her side and glaring at this Skelton.

"What in the name o' Hades?" says he.

"Brother," George says to him, 'you dang near made a bad blunder. There in that casket lie the remains of this young woman's child. Her husband skipped, and the baby died the second day after its birth. We're taking the body back to rest with its ancestors in Pittsburgh. I'd say the man who emptied out that casket would carry a curse on him for the rest of his days!'"

"Needless to say, that poor fellow pushed the casket away from him as if it had the plague," Caroline said. "I declare there was even a tear in his eye when he knelt down beside me, for I was 'coming to' by now. He patted my hand with his huge paw and assured me that he would cut it off before even thinking of causing me further pain. I thanked him, choking back my own 'tears' (actually, it was all I could do not to laugh out loud!). Then he called his cut-throats together and they rode off into the forest, shouting like drunken Indians."

"Soon as they was gone," Uncle Billy said, "we hitched up the horses and whipped them all the way up to Columbia Township on the Duck River. George always said that the baby-casket scene was the best performance Caroline ever gave!"

"Certainly the most lucrative," Caroline said. "And now, we must be going, for I think Sarah has an early start in the morning."

"Oh, please don't break up the party on my account," Sarah said. "Stay, tell some more stories!"

"Another time, my dear," Caroline said, touching Sarah's hand. She glanced at Theo as she rose and, while the gentlemen were fetching the cloaks, bent close to Sarah's ear.

"If you ever feel you need someone to talk to," she whispered, "come and see me. Sometimes strangers are more help than friends."

Theo came back into the room before Sarah could answer. They said their good nights and Hall opened the door of the house. There were four steps down to the street. It was cool outside. A thin mist coming in off the

Pacific concealed the foot of the hill down which the street ran.

As Theo stepped on to the sidewalk and turned to say good night to Hall McAllister a dark figure rushed out of the shadows and before anyone could even react struck Theo heavily across the face, knocking him sprawling into the street. Louisa screamed in fright, and men came running towards the fracas, shouting.

"God in Heaven!" Hall McAllister said. "It's Charlie Malone!"

In the faint light coming from the house Sarah saw that it was indeed her husband who had hit Theo, and who was now hauling the fuddled man back to his feet. As Theo came erect, he grappled with his assailant and they stood swaying in the center of the street. A carriage careened by, missing them narrowly, its driver cursing the two reeling figures he had barely managed to avoid. Sarah was conscious only of the hoarse shouts of the watching men and an awful sense of dread rising in her breast. She ran out shouting her husband's name, trying to separate the two men, but she was thrust aside by a short-armed shove from Charlie that sent her sprawling in the gutter. Hall McAllister ran to her side and helped her up as Theo tore one of his hands loose from Charlie's restraining grip and bounced his knuckles off the side of his assailant's head. Charlie fell back slightly, and then surged forward again, his face twisted with anger and pain, striking wildly with clenched fists at Theo's body and face. Theo went down on the wet street, sliding in a strange, twisted way on the muddy scum. His face was bloody. As his body straightened out on the ground, Charlie Malone kicked him in the belly. Theo's body arched upwards in a spasm of pain, and Charlie kicked him again.

"She's my wife, you bastard!" Charlie shouted. "My wife, my wife, my wife, my wife!"

Each time he said the word he kicked Theo again. One of the watching men shouted something and tried to pull him back, whereupon Charlie wheeled and felled the man with a blow. Theo Carver was trying to get to his knees, and Charlie watched him with contemptuous hatred,

allowed him to make the tottering attempt to stand before he leaned back and hit Theo again, a terrible blow in the face. Theo cartwheeled backwards, but the encircling spectators pushed him forward towards the waiting fists of Charlie Malone. Charlie hit Theo again, every ounce of his strength in the blow. Theo fell to his knees, trying desperately to paw the blood out of his eyes. While his hands were up, Charlie kicked him in the belly. Theo slid over into the mud again, retching, groaning. There was blood coming out of his mouth, his nose, his ears. Charlie Malone stood with bloody fists akimbo on his hips, glaring at the animal thing writhing on the ground in front of him.

"Stay away from her!" he shouted. "If you ever see her again I'll kill you!"

"Charlie!" Sarah cried piteously from the sidewalk. He was ruining her name, ruining everything right here in the middle of the street, shouting out what she had done so that the whole city could hear it. And she had done nothing.

"As for you, you cheating bitch, stay with your toney friends who condone your adultery and shelter your sin!" Charlie shouted. "You'll never sleep beneath the same roof as me again!"

"Charlie!" Sarah cried, agony in her voice. "Listen to me, you're wrong, Charlie, wait, listen! I'll come with you now!"

"No!" Charlie said. His voice was suddenly normal. "I don't want you now, Sarah. I'd as soon be alone. For if there was one wrong word from anyone, I'd kill the man who said it. You hear me, Carver?"

He kicked Theo's supine form for emphasis, and Theo managed to move his head enough to indicate affirmation. His eyes were still unfocused; the world was a red blur and there was no feeling in the middle of his body.

Charlie turned on his heel and stalked away down the hill without another word, shouldering angrily through the assembled crowd of gawkers as though daring any one of them to say something to which he could take offense. They avoided his challenging stare, fastening their greedy eyes on the sobbing form of Sarah Malone standing inside the sheltering circle of Louisa McAllister's arms, on the

sight of Hall McAllister lifting the battered form of his friend up the steps of the house.

"Vultures!" Charlie said, and spat into the gutter. He did not see the startled look of recognition on the face of one of the men in the crowd, a skinny fellow with a stringy beard and a face wasted by deprivation.

"Here," the man said to another standing close by. "Who was that fellow?"

"That's Charlie Malone, that was," the man said. "Why?"

"Nothing," was the reply. "Thought I knew him, that's all. Where does he hang his hat?"

"Got a store on the corner of Kearney and Market," said his informant. "That's his wife there, the dark-haired one. Nice kettle o' fish all this, ain't it?"

The dark man was not interested in tittle-tattle. He hurried off, head down, eyes fixed on the figure of Charlie Malone hurrying down the hill towards the plaza.

By the time he reached Portsmouth Square Charlie's rage had already evaporated. He needed a drink, but he didn't want to drink in the company of men who'd hear all too soon of the affray on Stockton Street and the reasons for it. He felt guilty, and yet defiant. They had deserved everything they got, he told himself, still rueing it. He remembered as he walked that there was plenty of whisky at the store, and he decided to go down there, and have a few. Maybe he could think it all through, decide what to do next. It was all over now with Sarah. Somehow he felt relieved. He was free, but he felt lost. Bitch, he thought, I'm well shot of her, knowing he would miss her sorely. He turned right on Kearney and headed for Market Street. The thin, dark man with the wasted face watched from a safe distance, deep in shadowed hiding. When he saw Charlie unlock the door and go into the store he nodded. Drawing his thin coat closer around his body, the dark man huddled down in a doorway to wait.

It was almost four in the morning before Charlie Malone came out of the store again. He had drunk all the whisky there was without satisfying his need. Now there was nothing for it but to find someplace that was still open and get more. Besides, he was feeling the desire for warmth

and light and noise and camaraderie. There was an all-night place on Kearney, the Blue Elephant, where he knew some of the boys. It was still dark, and between Market and Bush there were only some warehouses and a couple of stores. No one was about, and Charlie shivered in the pre-dawn cold. He crossed over Bush and as he did so a man came out of nowhere and fell in step alongside him.

"Malone, isn't it?" the man said. He was thin and dark haired, and he looked sick and anxious. Charlie didn't know him at all.

"That's right," he said. "Who are you?"

"You don't remember me?"

Charlie frowned and looked more closely at the man. He was tall, and he looked half-starved. His clothes were poor and greasy, the kind the Pikes—Missourians—had worn in the old days.

"Can't say I do," Charlie said off-handedly. To get rid of the man, he dug his hand into his pocket for a dollar. The man spoke before he got it out.

"Mokelumne Hill," the man said.

"You were up there?"

"I was that," the man said. "Phil Brace is my name."

"I don't recall . . .," Charlie began, and then all at once he saw the sloping hillside, the tent, the thin man with the stringy beard who had run like a rabbit when he saw the knife in Charlie's hand.

"Aha," said Brace. "I see you've remembered."

"You were one of the men who tried to jump our claim that day!"

"I'd have said it was the other way around," Brace said.

"To hell with that!" Charlie said, shouldering the man out of his path. "And to hell with you, too!"

"You don't feel you wronged me?" Brace whined behind him.

"Wronged you?" Charlie shouted, wheeling to face the man. "You insolent bastard, you're lucky I didn't kill you then."

"Lucky, is it?" Brace snarled. "Lucky to be starving, living like a foraging rat while you grow fat on gold me and my partners should have dug! Lucky, is it? Well, take that for your luck, you bastard!"

The Bowie knife moved in a short, sharp arc that Charlie never had any chance of avoiding. He looked down at his own body and saw the blood, and then he looked at Brace in astonished horror. Anger boiled in him and he reached for Brace, who turned and ran. Charlie looked down at his hands; they were thickly coated with sticky blood.

"Christ," he said. He already felt lightheaded. The eleven-inch blade had sliced through an artery inside him. He did not know it, but he only had minutes more to live. He decided to try to get to the Blue Elephant and started to walk up Kearney Street, an erratic line of puddled blood marking his path. By the time he had walked fifty yards he was reeling like a drunk, and the entire front of his body was covered in blood. He fell several times. When he reached the saloon he burst in. The place was almost empty. There were a couple of tarts standing by the bar. One of them screamed when she saw him. Charlie stood in the center of the floor, swaying like a tree about to fall.

They were all gaping at him like he was a fish in a goldfish bowl. Charlie wanted to tell them what had happened but the words wouldn't come. Suddenly he felt very, very bad and then he was on the floor and there was wet sawdust in his mouth. I must have fallen down, he thought, that's strange. He saw a man's face looming over him.

"Who did this, Charlie?" the man said. It was Cyrus Townsend, the man who owned the saloon. Many the drink they'd taken together, Charlie thought.

"Charlie," Cyrus said. His voice was sombre and very urgent, and he shook Charlie's shoulder. He shouldn't do that, Charlie thought petulantly, I'm hurt. "Charlie," Townsend said, "the doctor's coming. Now tell me who did this to you?"

"Sarah," Charlie said. The word felt as thick as treacle in his throat. "Get Sarah."

"Your wife? Where is she, at the store?"

Stupid bastard, Charlie thought, what was the matter with him? Everyone knew Sarah was at the McAllisters. Why were they all crowding around staring at him? He was fed up with making decisions. He wished they would

all get back so he could see the light. It had gone very dark and he felt very tired.

"Charlie!" Townsend said, shaking him again. "Charlie, you're dying! Tell us who did this!"

Dying? Charlie thought. I can't die, I'm not going to die. I want to see her, I don't want to die without seeing her, just let me have that, let me see her and let me see Theo. Oh, God, oh Jesus, don't let me die yet.

"Charlie, tell us," Cyrus Townsend said, trying one last time.

"Theo," Charlie said. He started to say his wife's name, too, but he died before he could do it.

"It's all over now," Theo said. "All over."

He slumped into an armchair and stared unseeing at the fire in the hearth. His face was drawn and wan, and his shoulders bowed by the events of the past twelve months. Sarah's heart filled with concern and sadness, for had she not doubted him herself? When the saloon-keeper Townsend had declared at the coroner's inquest that Charlie, dying, named Theo as his murderer her heart had turned to stone. Could the gentle man she loved have butchered poor Charlie on the dark street? Had the awful humiliation of his beating ignited a fire of passionate revenge in Theo's heart that only murder could quell? She did not want to believe it, she could not believe it, and yet her dreams were filled with pale phantoms of fear.

Theo was arrested and held in the same jail as Charles Cora for the week it took Hall McAllister to satisfactorily establish that at the time of Charlie's murder Theo had been in the surgery of Dr. Michael Thornton on Stockton Street, having his battered body bandaged, the lacerations in his scalp stitched, the massive bruises examined. Dr. Thornton testily pointed out to the sheriff that Theodore Carver would have had trouble stepping on a 'roach in the condition he'd been in. Scannell shrugged and turned Theo loose, although not without regret.

"It would have warmed the cockles of my heart to see you swing, Carver," he said coldly as Theo was collecting

his belongings at the desk. "And I'm still not altogether convinced you mightn't have had this done anyway."

"Be very careful of your tongue, Scannell," McAllister said, "or it'll land you in the middle of a libel suit."

"Sure, sue and be damned to you!" the fat man said. "I'll say what I like."

"Try it," McAllister said. "You don't have that much in the bank."

Scannell just smiled, and Theo knew that the sheriff would keep the rumors simmering. Maybe Carver hadn't done the job himself, but that didn't mean he hadn't hired it done. Everyone knew how easy that was. There were plenty of men who'd kill for a century. After all, wasn't he tugging the other man's ewe? Hadn't there been a street brawl? Wasn't it convenient that Malone's debts to Charles Cora, who needed every penny he could lay his hands on, were cancelled by his death? And if that death had been at the hands of someone who wanted Cora dead? Everyone knew Theodore Carver was behind the *Bulletin*. There was more to it all than met the eye, you could be sure of that.

Theo was free, but the talk persisted. Sarah saw it in the faces of the men and women who came into the store, knew it by the way they looked at her, their eyes like razors. The covert glances and whispered asides distressed her so much that she found it daily more difficult to go to the store. Yet she knew that she must, for her absence would fan the flames of gossip even higher. As for Theo, he knew it was the Broderick clique who were trying to destroy him, knew only too well that Bella Cora was behind the worst of it. She was not satisfied—she had hoped Charlie would kill Theo. She spent what little time she had left over from campaigning for Cora's release vilifying Theo Carver as a man of no morals, no scruples, and no mercy. She drew the city's attention to the fact that Carver was paying court to Malone's widow, and the man not yet cold in his grave. One way, she said with a harsh laugh, to get back the property he'd sold the dead man. All this Theo steeled himself against, riding roughshod over whatever people thought of him. He ignored all the attempts to discredit him, and by the sheer strength of his person-

ality alone made business acquaintances accept his continued presence among them.

For Sarah it was different. She felt branded, and found ever more frequent excuses to retreat from public view: a head cold, a sprained ankle, overtiredness. She was not fooling anyone and she knew it, and in her absences the clerks at the store were stealing her blind, almost contemptuously daring her to make a scene in front of such few customers as were now patronizing the store. She was being punished, Sarah knew, by the "decent" women of the city.

"Damn them!" Theo exploded when she told him that her former customers were no longer coming to the store. "Damn them all, and let them go elsewhere if that's how they feel!"

"Theo," she said. "The store is all I have. Charlie left nothing but debts."

"Marry me," he said. "Marry me tomorrow and forget the store. Forget the debts, forget everything, forget the damned stupid gossip, the whole damned stupid mess!"

Sarah shook her head. "That wouldn't do it, Theo," she said. "To marry you so soon after Charlie's death would only confirm in their minds that everything bad they thought about us was true, that I cared so little for my husband that I was prepared to marry within months the man who had him murdered!"

"Sarah!" Theo said, shock in his voice. "You know that isn't so."

"Of course I do," she said, "but they don't."

"Guilty until proved innocent," he said bitterly.

Yes, she thought. She had lain awake through the cold, gray hours of many dawns thinking that, and just as bitterly. And she had felt the far, faint, feathery suspicions touch her mind: what if, what if . . . ? Then she would banish the thoughts, call them night fears, remember the Theo she knew and loved and respected. Loved? Did she after all really love him? And if she loved Theo, what had she felt for Charlie? Would she really know love? Infatuation, desire, proximity, all these burned with a flame the unwary often mistook for love. Did she want

to live for the rest of her life with Theo Carver? For all that he loved her, Theo was not a loving man. She would in time become not his wife but just his wife, another possession, another aspect of him. Was that enough? And if it were, if she did marry him, what then? Polite society would unobtrusively but firmly close its doors in their faces. Hall McAllister had already asked Theo to release him from his position as legal adviser, pleading overwork. Louisa had neither written nor called, and Sarah was sure that Hall had forbidden her to do so. They were avoiding Theo, keeping out of the whole mess.

Confused, worried, Sarah sought the advice of the one person to whom she still could turn. She went to see Caroline Chapman. She confessed her fears, put her worries into words, poured out all the trepidation and hope that was in her heart. As the afternoon lengthened into twilight evening, a maid brought tea in a Crown Derby pot, and then as silently withdrew. When Sarah finished they sat in silence for a while. Caroline went over to the window and looked out at the slope of Telegraph Hill falling away towards the waterfront.

"Well," she said eventually, her words like a slap in the face to Sarah, "you're good and sorry for yourself, aren't you?"

"I . . . I had not thought so," Sarah said. "I thought you'd understand."

"Is that what you came here for?" Caroline said. "Pity?"

"No," Sarah said, her lips becoming a straight line. "I thought—don't know what I thought. Whatever it was, I was obviously wrong. I won't take up any more of your time—"

"Oh, sit down, Sarah!" Caroline snapped. "You've more brains than that!"

Sarah sat down again abruptly, her mouth open with surprise.

"Now," Caroline said. "What do you want—sympathy or advice?"

"I . . . both," Sarah said. "But especially advice."

"Good, I'll give you the last first," Caroline said. "It is this: leave San Francisco. Leave Theo Carver behind you. Turn your back on everything here and start again

somewhere else. Bella Cora has money and powerful friends. From what I have heard said, she is determined to bring down Theodore. If she can use you to do it, Sarah, she will—and you are a much more vulnerable target than he is. Stay here and she will attack you. Stay here and you will make it easy for her!”

“Why would she want to attack me?” Sarah said. “I have never even seen her. Why should she wish to harm me?”

“You don’t count, my dear,” Caroline said. “You are merely a pawn. It is Theo that she wants to destroy. Leave San Francisco and you remove the means through which she can do it.”

“And what of love?” cried Sarah. “What of love?”

“Ah, love,” Caroline said with a sad smile. “Lovers think that their love alone will alter the world. Alas, it is not so. You say that Theo wants to marry you. Do you want to marry him?”

“Yes,” Sarah said. “I think so.”

“True love *knows*, Sarah, it does not think,” Caroline said. “True love moves mountains, walks through fire, lasts beyond eternity. But it does not think. If you only think you are in love, better not to marry ever.”

“Caroline, it is easy for you to say, but not so easy for me to do. You have fame, money, your own home, a secure future. I have nothing. Nothing.”

“Let me tell you a story,” Caroline said. “No, sit still, there’s a point to it. It is about a young man, an actor. He lived in England then, a handsome fellow, devil-may-care for sure. By the time he was twenty it was certain that he would be one of the most famous actors in London, like his father before him. Then one night he arrived at the theater to find two things awaiting him: a babe in a makeshift cradle, and a note that said, “For this birth there will now be a death!” It was signed by a man of wealth and power, a man who could sign the death warrant of another without rising from his chair.”

“And the child?”

“This man’s unmarried daughter’s child,” Caroline said. “So the young actor—whose name was William—was smuggled out of the theater that night, and put in a coach bound for the Weymouth docks, where a berth aboard the

Charming Sally awaited him. He sailed on the tide for America, where he made a new life, becoming as famous under his assumed name as he had been in England under his real one. Some years later his family—including the love-child left at the theater all those years before—joined him in America. The child grew up. She, too, went into the theater. Fame, fortune, a home, a secure future, wasn't that what you said? All there were hers, yet she was sentenced to live for ever beneath the cloud of her illegitimacy. None but a very few of her closest friends knew that the actor the world thought her brother was in fact her father. No one—"

"You?" Sarah whispered. "Uncle Billy is not your brother?"

"No," Caroline said. "My father. I never knew my mother."

"Oh Caroline," Sarah said, reaching to enfold her friend in her arms. "I am so sorry, so very sorry."

"I didn't tell you all this to enlist your pity," Caroline said, drawing back, "but to show you that all is not what you see. You say you have nothing, nowhere to go. Neither did I. Neither do thousands of others, Sarah, yet somehow they survive. Somehow they live their lives and do the best they can. Nobody makes it easy for them. Why should it be made easy for you?"

"I didn't ask for it to be made easy," Sarah said quietly. "I simply hadn't realized that the choice was quite so cruel."

"Have you any money?"

"A little. Not much."

"You're strong," Caroline said. "You can work."

"In a store," Sarah said.

"In a store," Caroline said. "Or in a factory. Or on a farm. You can sew. You can wash clothes."

"I could be an actress," Sarah said, all at once.

"What?"

"If you were to help me," Sarah said, stumbling over the words in her haste to say them before Caroline stopped her saying any more.

"Sarah, do you know what you are saying? Do you have any idea of what the life of an actress is like?"

"Yes. No. It doesn't matter. I could do it. You said yourself—"

"Sarah, have you any conception of how many people try, how many fail? It is a cruel profession, my dear, especially for a woman. While you have your looks, there's not a producer that won't consider you—for his bed. Once they have gone, you have, either success or the street. Nothing else."

"You make it sound awful," Sarah said.

"It is," Caroline replied, "and I would be no friend if I did not tell you."

"You are no friend to dash all my hopes," Sarah said.

"Oh, come now, don't pout, Sarah! Tell me—what made you suddenly think that becoming an actress would solve your problems?"

"I don't know," Sarah said. "It seemed so—natural, somehow."

"It is hardly that," Caroline said tartly. "I don't imagine Maguire gets many applications from widowed store-keepers who wish to embark upon a theatrical career!"

"Then that's his misfortune," Sarah said spiritedly, and Caroline laughed infectiously. "I don't care," Sarah said, "I love the theater. I love the lights, and the scenery, and the words, the poetry."

"Yes," Caroline said dryly. "They tend to lose some of their luster after eighteen performances a week, you know."

"I wouldn't care!" Sarah said. "I would love it. Oh, surely you can help me? Isn't there some academy somewhere, some school where they teach one to act?"

"It isn't something that can be taught like arithmetic, Sarah," Caroline said. "It is in you or it is not. A spark. If you have it, you can be anything. Without it, you will be nothing."

"You don't think I have it."

"Perhaps. There is a way we could find out."

"How?" Sarah asked, leaning forward excitedly. "Tell me how!"

"I have a cousin," Caroline told her. "In Louisville, Kentucky. Our family owns a place near there, Harmony Farm. Frances Ann lives there with her family. I think perhaps if you went and saw her. . . ."

"Yes," Sarah said. "Is she a teacher?"

"In a way," Caroline said, "but not the way you think. I will tell you this much, however. If Frances Ann thinks you have the makings of an actress, she will move heaven and earth to help you."

"And if she thinks that I do not?"

"Then it will be the store or the sewing-room or the farm or the wash-house, for Frances Ann will tell you and she will not mince words."

"If you would write to her. . . ?" Sarah said. "If she would let me come?"

"I'll write to her," Caroline said. "When we have her reply, we shall make our plans."

"How . . . how long do you think it will take?" Sarah asked.

"I don't know, child," the actress said. "Three months, four."

"And what shall I do in the meantime?"

"Survive, child, as we all do," Caroline said.

Somehow Sarah lived through the months that followed. Winter softened into spring and the winds grew warmer. Theo busied himself with plans for the future, corresponding furiously with his brother Ezra, involving himself deeply in the preparations of the fledgling Republican Party to ensure the nomination of General Frémont for President at the party's first National Convention, to be held in June in Philadelphia. He was determined to participate in the overthrow of the thieves controlling San Francisco, and to this end urged James King of William to increase his attacks upon them—especially on David Broderick and James Casey. King decided to take Casey first, principally because the *Daily California Chronicle* had done most of his work for him the preceding November, establishing that Casey had got himself elected to the post of city supervisor by stuffing ballot boxes. The newspaper also revealed that Casey had served time in New York's Sing Sing prison for stealing the furniture of his prostitute mistress. King ran across a story that someone named Des Bagley had been heard threatening to attack Casey, and the editor ran a

"defense" of the City Supervisor in the *Evening Bulletin* which effectively cut Casey to ribbons.

It does not matter how bad a man Casey had been, or how much benefit it might be to the public to have him out of the way, we cannot accord to any one citizen the right to kill him, or even beat him, without justification or personal provocation.

The fact that Casey had been an inmate of Sing Sing prison in New York is no offense against the laws of this state; nor is the fact of his having stuffed himself through the ballot box as elected to the Board of Supervisors any justification for Mr. Bagley to shoot Mr. Casey, however richly the latter may deserve to have his neck stretched for such fraud.

The paper hit the street at about three o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, May 14. At five, as King left his office, James Casey walked up and shot him with a .38 Navy Colt. King stumbled into the Pacific Express Company's office, mortally wounded, while Casey surrendered himself to the police in order to dodge the crowd which immediately assembled on Montgomery Street. Casey was taken to the jail and put into the cell next to Charles Cora. Cora stared through the bars at his new neighbor for a full minute, regarding Casey as if the man were some strange new species of cockroach. There were infinities of disgust in his voice when he finally spoke.

"You damned fool," he told Casey. "You've put the noose around both our necks for sure!"

By seven o'clock there was a mob of thousands outside the jail, howling for blood. The bell of the old Monumental Engine Company had been rung, the old Vigilance Committee hastily reassembled. All business in the city came to a standstill and stayed that way, one day, and then another, and then still another, as King's life hung by a thread. A huge crowd stood in silence outside the editor's house, their mood ominous, threatening. Even more waited close to the jail: there would be no slipping the prisoners away to safety in Marysville or Sacramento. On Saturday

the doctors attending King announced that there was no hope and the town went raving mad.

The vigilantes stormed the city jail, William Tell Coleman at their head. They dragged Casey and Cora out. Dave Scannell did not try to stop them. He was a brave enough man, but he had only forty men to back him. The mob was several thousands strong.

"You'll let them take us, Dave?" Casey whined. "You'll not protect us?"

Scannell's beefy face flushed with shame. He shook his head as the two men were hustled out. Cora turned and spat on the floor before they dragged him down the steps and into a carriage. The howling mob pursued it down the street to 105½ Sacramento Street, chanting, "Hang them now! Hang them now! Hang them now! Hang them now!"

Coleman put a guard of three hundred armed men around the Sacramento Street rooms. Neither the mob nor any friends of Cora and Casey were going to lay a hand on the men until justice had been done and been seen to be done. The town was in a ferment. Men roamed the streets in packs like wolves, spoiling for trouble. Fights broke out everywhere. Even the whores stayed off the streets.

King died on Tuesday, May 20. Theo was one of the last people to see him. He came out and passed the word to the waiting crowd, which greeted the news with a silence infinitely more ominous than all the screamed threats and drunken curses had ever been. There had never been any question in anybody's mind that Casey was as guilty as hell. They sentenced him to death at Sacramento Street, and then tried Cora again. The verdict here, too, was death.

"Have you anything to say, Cora?" the committee asked.

"Hang me and be damned!" the gambler snarled.

On Thursday, while a crowd estimated at twenty thousand people followed James King's coffin to the graveside at Lone Mountain, the vigilantes did just that. Cora and Casey were hanged from a beam above the windows of vigilante headquarters at 1:21 p.m. Cora had married Bella in his cell two hours earlier, a Catholic priest, Father Accolti, pronouncing them man and wife. Theo told Sarah

all of this when he returned from the cemetery, where he had read the oration over King's grave.

"It's all over now," he lied. "All over."

It was not, of course, but there was no point in telling Sarah that now. Perhaps with King dead Bella Cora would be satisfied, but he doubted it: she was a mean and vengeful woman and if she could harm them still she would. Bella would try to reach back from beyond the grave to ruin anyone who had taken a hand in the hanging of Cora. So he told Sarah it was all over, not adding that they had two men under arrest down at Sacramento Street, one of whom had already confessed to several murders, Charlie Malone's among them. He was sick, tired of all the violence, the murders, the hangings. He would tell her about it all later, he decided. Tomorrow, perhaps.

Oh Theo, Sarah thought. She ached to tell him that she was leaving. She longed to have him take her in his arms and tell her that she must not go, hold her tight and never let her go. Yet she knew now, quite finally, that go she would. Caroline Chapman's cousin had replied to Caroline's letter, welcoming Sarah to Harmony Farm for as long as she cared to stay. Arrangements had been made; Sarah would travel up to Sacramento on the evening steamer, there to rendezvous with a wagon train heading east. She would be in Louisville by mid-summer, she thought; committed to the point of no return, Sarah was afraid. What her life would be, what would happen to her, she did not know. Once she stepped aboard the *Pacific* at seven o'clock that night she would be stepping into the unknown, more alone than she had ever been in all her life.

"I only stopped by for a moment," Theo was saying. "I have to go downtown. We can talk about everything later. Now that it's all over, we can be married, Sarah. There's nothing to stand in our way."

"Yes, Theo," she said. She felt the knife of her own deceit in her heart and it twisted, red hot and agonizing, when he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I'm so tired, Sarah," he said. "So damnably tired."

"We can talk tomorrow," she said. "Decide everything then."

"I suppose so," Theo said. "Perhaps tomorrow would be better. I've no idea how long this business downtown will take anyway. But will you promise me something?"

"Anything," Sarah said, suspended in pain.

"Think about what I said. About us. I want you to be my wife."

"I'll think about it," Sarah said.

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart," she said. *And hope to die.* She heard the clang of the ship's bell, felt the lurch of the engines starting up as clearly as if she were actually on board the vessel. Here in the arms of the man who loved her and wanted her she was lying as callously as any stranger.

"Good," Theo said. "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

"Yes," Sarah said, "tomorrow," thinking, tomorrow never comes.

BOOK TWO

1856-1871

Ezra Carver was a man who followed his own star. He'd told his brother that he'd do better back east than he would in California, but that didn't mean he would turn his nose up at California money. In 1853 he sold his interests in the overland route across Nicaragua for \$950,000; before the ink was dry on the contract he had ordered preliminary work begun on a railroad across the Panama isthmus. When the news of Carver's new exploit broke on the Exchange, investors went wild to get money into the venture. To no avail; the shares had been fully subscribed before the announcement was even made.

Work was completed in the early months of 1855, and it then became possible to cross the isthmus in less than four hours. Good connections between New York and Manzanilla, between Panama City and San Francisco, were assured by Carver Shipping. The trans-Nicaraguan consortium to whom Ezra had sold out went bankrupt long before the first trains steamed up the valley of the Chagres River.

Ezra assessed his forward plans. The earnings of the Manzanilla railroad were substantial, but nothing like enough to finance the expansion he had in mind. In the fall of 1855 he sold his shares and looked around for fresh fields to conquer.

He had a great many ships, many more than were needed to fulfil his leasing agreements with the Manzanilla railroad. He had Papa John Terrill's connections in the

cotton-growing South. It was no great leap of the imagination to see the most profitable line to pursue, and Ezra pursued it. He began to build a transatlantic fleet, one which would carry cotton from Southern ports to Liverpool and Glasgow, bringing back European luxuries to be transhipped to California or to rich planters in the South. There was a new and equally lucrative secondary cargo burgeoning in European ports: emigrants. At fifteen or twenty dollars a head, emigrants out of England or Ireland could be brought across in the half-empty holds. They were self-maintaining cargo.

With the same enthusiasm and energy that characterized his every action, Ezra plunged into the new business, and within six months he was running a regular scheduled service from Liverpool via Queenstown to New York and Charleston. It was no real challenge to Cunard or White Star, not yet, but it would grow. From the very outset the ships produced profits which Ezra now began to shrewdly invest in railroad stocks.

He was well off, he was busy, he was happy: another new business to learn, to examine, to expand. There weren't enough days in the year to encompass all the things Ezra wanted to do.

Jane Terrill Carver had changed, just as Ezra had changed, during the three years of their marriage. Where before she had been a beautiful girl, Jane had become a serene and lovely woman. A trifle pale, perhaps, more delicate of frame than some; she tired easily, although she rarely mentioned it to Ezra. He had little time for vapors, and not much more for frailty. Jane saw it as her role and her duty to provide Ezra with a refuge from the world of business, to offset the harsher edges of his nature with the softer touches of her homemaking. Unless Ezra was out of town. Jane would see to it that dinner was on the table each evening at eight sharp, the candles lit, Moggy the cat curled up on the window-seat, and the baby snug in his crib. As Hannah brought in the food, Jane would ask Ezra about his day, hear all the news. They would often stay at the table talking until ten o'clock.

The tranquillity of her life pleased Jane, just as the assured strength of her husband supported and confirmed

her sense of being useful and wanted. If there had been no sweeping passion in Ezra's wooing, no great conflagration of emotion in her heart, she felt but little loss. Life was not composed of kissing and cuddling, and Ezra was, in any case, the very opposite of demonstrative. Even so, she felt certain that he loved her, and only wished that he loved her as much as she loved him. His tempers, his cynicisms, his cutting jibes sometimes wounded her dreadfully, but she knew they were but one side of his nature. He was also generous and intelligent, respected by everyone in business, important. These qualities were a sun in which she basked; she was the wife of Ezra Carver.

So if sometimes she felt sad without truly knowing why, Jane lived a life full and crowded with Ezra's plans, ambitions, hopes, and ideas. They were all urgent, all exciting—sometimes even unnerving. Ezra told her about everything at first; but after a while he realized that she had no memory for the names of the people he told her about, no conception of the intricacies of the maneuvers he was effecting, no real involvement in any of it except as his supporter. If Ezra wanted her to be angry, then Jane would show anger. Let him tell her how unscrupulous some business competitor was and she would be righteously indignant on Ezra's behalf. He knew he would never be able to make her understand what he did and how he did it, and after a while told her only those things she needed to know about. It didn't seem to make any difference.

Jane went down to visit her family every two or three months and brought back stories of the growing division between the South and the North, the constant arguments for and against slavery. John and James, her brothers, were vehement advocates of an eventful secession of the South from the Union. Indeed, on Ezra's last visit to Fairacres there had been a dangerously heated discussion of the sense—from John's and James's points of view—or insanity—from Ezra's—of such a proposition. It had ended with the two brothers storming away from the table in anger. Ezra had not been shocked, although he allowed himself to be surprised that the dislike Jane's brothers had never troubled to conceal had hardened now into something close to hatred. How could you hate a man because

of where he came from? he wondered. He had never done anything for the Terrill family but improved their fortunes, yet John and James hated him. Because he was a "Yankee."

Ezra decided he could do without the long journey to Fairacres if all he was going to get when he got there was hot-head hostility. It made the visit to the plantation distasteful to him and downright distressing for Jane. So she began to go alone, returning each time with sadder tales. John and James were dominating their father, he was afraid of his sons. Mama Claudette was sick all the time, dark, dark circles beneath her eyes, growing thinner with every month that passed. She spoke bitterly of approaching death, as if its hovering presence were a personal insult.

After her return North Jane wept a great deal over the memory of her mother's wasted frame, the haunted fear she had seen in the dark eyes. She could not forget the ominous presence of death she had sensed at the farm. She clung to Ezra in their bed, sobbing herself to sleep night after night. He did not know what to do to console her, how to stop her making herself ill. He made love to her, and was shocked at the urgency of her responses. It was as if she was clinging desperately to him, holding on so that she would not drown. Then, hours later, he would be awakened by the sound of her soft sobs.

In the spring of 1856 Claudette Terrill succumbed to the malignant thing inside her. The doctors could do nothing to alleviate her distress during the long months it took her to die. She passed away almost apologetically, her death no less a shock to Jane because it had been expected. Ezra watched in dismay as his wife grew ever more wan and drawn in the months following Claudette Terrill's death. Jane had been in the fourth month of her second pregnancy when her mother died, and was too poorly to go to Virginia for the funeral. She seemed in some obscure way to be blaming herself for her absence, as if being there might have changed what everyone knew inevitable.

With so much to do, and so little time in which to do it, Ezra viewed a visit to Virginia with little relish—but he knew he must go, if only for Jane. She was big with child

now, and unwell all the time. She pined for news of all at home, and asked Ezra if he would put flowers on her mother's grave. He agreed with the utmost reluctance. He did not like her morbid preoccupation with her mother's death, but hoped that cheerful news of Papa John might make his wife feel better. He was doomed to disappointment.

Papa John had turned into a wispy old man who smiled a lot, as if anxious to please, whenever either of his two sons came into the room. John and James were family men now: their children noisy on the once-serene sloping lawn, throwing stones at the swans. They were as dark as their sister was fair, as narrow of vision as their father had been tolerant. The time for talking was over, they told Ezra. The South would henceforth fend for itself. It needed no help from the North or anyone in it. The inference and the insult were plain, but Ezra held his temper. He had learned that a long time ago: there was no use shouting at hotheads.

"I don't know that I understand you," he said. "Do you mean that you support slavery and plan to extend it?"

"We support the right of the South to make its own decisions, about slavery or anything else!" John said.

"But of course," Ezra said. "Doesn't everyone?"

"Not you damned Yankees!" James blurted.

Ezra looked across the table at Papa John. Not many years back anyone who had sworn at John Terrill's table would have been asked to leave. Now the old man looked bewildered, lost. It was as if he were a child in a strange house where the occupants were arguing in a foreign language. We always have such hope for the next generation, Ezra thought, and they always let us down. Hate was being brewed in the lofty, sunlit rooms of Fairacres, and for the first time he felt the premonition of disaster. All this will disappear, he thought. They want war. It was insanity. Looking across the table at John and James Terrill he felt saddened, downcast by their anger and hatred.

He told them he would leave immediately; he was worried about Jenny and wanted to get back. John and

James asked him to join them in the library before he left, and he did so. One day long ago he had wooed a lovely girl in white in the same sunlit room.

"We want father's shares back, Ezra," John said without preamble. He was tall now, slimmer than James—James had always been the chubby-faced one of the pair, Ezra recalled. He would have been handsome but for a sullen, pouting mouth. James was like his brother and yet unlike. There was no question as to which of them was the dominant one.

"When father gave me control of the shares in what was then Merchants Express, John, they were worthless," Ezra said. "The company was almost bankrupt. Since that time I have built up my own business and those shares have grown in value with it. To sell them at this time would seriously weaken my position."

"I don't—we don't care about your *position*," John said with a sneer. "We don't care about you at all. Or any other Yankee."

"And Jane? Your sister? Is she just any other Yankee, too?"

"Jane made her decision when she left Fairacres to marry you," James said. His voice was petulant; he constantly looked at John as if for support, encouragement. My God, what a pair of fools! Ezra thought. To accede to their stupidity was to permit them to ruin themselves and jeopardize several points he was trying to make.

He was putting together a portfolio of railroad bonds, and the task was as delicate as brain surgery. One leak of his intentions to the vultures on the Exchange who watched his every move in the hope of themselves making a fast buck, and the applecart would be upset, rendering six months of work worthless. To cover the stocks, Ezra had laid out a great deal of his personal capital; if he now had to finance the purchase of the Terrill family holdings in Carver Shipping he would be hard put to stay solvent. Yet he could not in any way prevent them from asking for what was theirs by right.

"It isn't that easy," he hedged. "You can't just unload a block of shares that big on to the market all at once."

"Why not?" John said.

"Because it would drive down the value of the shares, reduce the worth of the whole company."

"That doesn't matter a damn!" John snapped. "We're not out to keep you in business, Ezra!"

"We just want the money," James said. "It's ours by right, and we want it."

"What about your father?" Ezra asked. "What does he say?"

"He says whatever we want him to say," John said. "He's gone feeble-minded. You saw that for yourself."

"I can't believe that he's become so feeble-minded that he'd stand by and see you rob me—rob your sister, too—like cut-throats!"

"It doesn't matter what you believe or don't believe," John said coldly. "Buy us out, or we'll sell the shares for whatever they'll fetch on the market."

"A third of the family's share is Jane's," Ezra said. "That at least you will concede."

"We concede nothing to you!" John hissed. "Nothing!"

There was no point in arguing, Ezra saw. They were determined to go ahead, like wanton children breaking a toy for the sheer perverse pleasure of doing it.

"I'll buy you out," Ezra agreed. "It will take a little time to raise the money, you realize?"

"How long?"

"Three, four weeks."

"We'll give you two," John said.

"Three, minimum," Ezra snapped back, angry now himself. "Or you can sell and be damned to you, we'll all go under together!"

James looked at his older brother. Something passed between them, agreement, something. John shrugged.

"All right," he said. Ezra nodded. Having made his point, won the breathing space he needed, he went across to the sideboard and poured himself a whisky, oblivious to the lambent stare directed at him by John.

"Make the most of it," John said. "You're not welcome here any more, Ezra. We'd prefer you to be gone as soon as possible."

"No gladder than I," Ezra said, and turned his back on both of them. Fire-eaters, he thought. There were a

lot of them in the South now. It was not an encouraging thought, and he poured himself another whisky. John and James had gone, and he stood alone for a long while, staring out at the lawns through the tall windows. The children had found other mischief and the swans were gliding serenely in the sunshine.

A small sound made Ezra turn around. Papa John had come into the room, his eyes wide with apprehension. He kept looking over his shoulder like a man pursued by invisible demons, and his hand trembled as he grasped Ezra's forearm.

"I wanted to talk to you," he said. "Before you leave."

"Do you know what's happened, Papa John?" Ezra asked. "Do you know what John and James are doing?"

"I know, I know," John Terrill said. "There's no talking to them any more. No talking to any of them. Isn't it?" What had once been an idiosyncrasy of speech now sounded like a wistful question.

"I know," Ezra said.

"I was saying to Claudette last night that the boys don't listen to me any more. 'What can I do, my dear?' I said to her. 'They are men grown now, with families of their own.'"

Ezra felt a chill at the base of his neck, as though some faint icy wind had touched him there lightly. Claudette Terrill was long dead and buried but the old man was still talking about her as if she was alive.

"Don't worry, Papa John," he said gently. "It's going to be all right."

"How's Jane?" the old man asked. "How is young Hartwell?"

"They're both fine," Ezra lied. Jane was not strong, not at all strong. "They sent you their love."

"Knew they would," Papa John said. "Want you to take a present to her. For the baby."

He thrust a heavy envelope into Ezra's hands, looking over his shoulder towards the door again, as if afraid of discovery and pursuit. Ezra started to open the envelope, but Papa John stopped him with a still-trembling hand.

"Not now, my boy, not now," he said. "It's for the baby, for Jane, you see. I had to do something. Isn't it?"

Again the words sounded like a plaintive question, and Ezra ached to console the old man, knowing there was no way he could. The changes which were overtaking the South were leaving men like Papa John centuries behind and there was no possibility of their ever catching up. They were like the dinosaurs: their way of life was being eclipsed and they were powerless to prevent it. Papa John could not cope with his losses: they had aged him, turned him into an infirm and insecure old man with wispy gray hair and bewildered eyes. Ezra remembered him in his prime, singing old sea shanties on his way down the stairs to breakfast. He felt very sad and, obscurely, very angry.

He left the next morning, the envelope tucked into his suitcase and for the moment forgotten. Jane opened it on his return to New York, and spread out the papers it contained. It was the title deed to Fairacres, signed over to his daughter by John Terrill and witnessed by Ebenezer Gresford, transferring complete ownership of the plantation and all its lands to Hartwell Carver, that ownership to be administered until his majority by his mother, Jane Terrill Carver. Papa John's gift was one of the few bright moments in an otherwise unremittingly dismal year.

In May Theodore's newspaper editor friend James King was assassinated on the streets of San Francisco, and mob law ruled the town for a week afterwards. Then the re-assembled vigilantes took the killers from their jail and hanged them.

Theo and Ezra met in Philadelphia the month following, at the first National Convention of the New Republican Party. Theo had come east to support the nomination of his friend Frémont, and Ezra renewed his acquaintance with the former Senator for California and his dark-haired, vivacious wife. He warmed no more to Frémont than he had in California. Though the renowned "Pathfinder" was courteous, handsome, slender and upright, with good eyes and a well-modulated voice, there was something about him that Ezra could not put a handle on, and never did. Jessie Benton Frémont was something else entirely, and he saw at once why Theo had been early smitten by her beauty. She *was* beautiful; no other word would do. In a dark-purple dress with a lace collar, with

that dark wavy hair and those flashing eyes, she made men compete to be near her, jostle to do her bidding. Ezra privately thought of her as Circe, turning men to swine. He watched her, admiring how she busily but determinedly worked at banishing from the minds of those around her husband the objections which were being raised to his nomination—mostly, as she rightly pointed out, by her father, the renowned Senator from Missouri. Only a few days earlier Senator Benton had delivered a blast pointing out that a third party nominee for the presidency was a further step towards the division of the Union.

"Papa is a dyed-in-the-wool old Democrat," Jessie Frémont told listeners gathered around her in the private room above the noisy convention hall. "He is so completely identified with Buchanan that I doubt we ought to listen more than half-seriously to anything he says. I do think, though, that it's a sort of Brutus stab to do something like this to his own son-in-law and daughter. It hurts me. It makes me wonder if I'm the right sort of stuff for a political woman!"

"You'll do, Jessie!" someone shouted.

"Of course she will!" shouted someone else, and there were cheers and applause. Jessie Frémont smiled, acknowledging the salutes, and Ezra thought he saw a flicker of triumph in her eyes, the look of a woman who has, with contemptuous ease, wound men once again around her little finger. No, he did not like the Frémonts, and he suspected their ambition. He concluded that they would in any case wreck every chance they got through egotism and recklessness. It was plain that they considered themselves measurably superior to the ordinary mortals with whom they were forced to mingle. Not for the first time or the last he wondered what the devil Theo saw in either of them.

Once the final nomination was made, the convention over, Ezra hurried back to New York. He was worried about Jane's health. Since Claudette Terrill's death Jane had lost her sparkle. Doctors prescribed iron tonics, and stays at the seaside. Ezra rented a big house looking out across Jamaica Bay, but his wife remained wan and withdrawn. He could not seem to lift the depression from her,

no matter how he tried. Jane herself tried not at all. He had told Theo all of this, and his brother understood only too well his hasty goodbyes at the station. Theo had told Ezra the whole story of what had happened in California, beginning hesitantly and then, finally, confiding everything—the fight outside the McAllister house, the senseless murder of Malone, the obloquy which followed. It was all pretty sordid, the more so because the woman at the center of it had been Malone's wife. It made no difference that towards the end the man had been no good. Sarah Malone had been a married woman and Theo ought to have known better than get mixed up with her.

However, there was no point in saying any of that now. The woman had run away, Theo said, disappeared. He had turned San Francisco upside down trying to find her, but to absolutely no avail. Sarah Malone had vanished as if the earth had swallowed her, and, to be honest about it, Ezra was relieved. If it had been a deliberate decision on the woman's part, then she had more sense than Theo, and he said so.

"I have to find her, Ez," Theo said. "I have to."

"Maybe you will," Ezra said, doubting it.

They embraced each other; then Ezra climbed aboard the train. He was anxious to get back to Jane, anxious to ensure that affairs he had set in motion prior to leaving New York for Philadelphia had been finalized. Ebenezer Gresford had informed John and James Terrill that their father had signed Fairacres over to their nephew. They had taken it badly; and Ezra knew that they would come to New York to see him. He was looking forward to rubbing their noses in it. As it happened, it didn't quite work out the way he expected.

John and James were waiting for him in the drawing-room of the house when he got home. There was no sign of Jane.

"She's lying down, Ezra," John said. "I'm afraid we had to tell her. Papa John died on Thursday."

"I'm sure you did it gently," Ezra said, pushing past them. "You'll forgive me if I leave you for a mo—"

"The doctor gave her a sedative," James said. "She's asleep."

"Is she?" Ezra said. He was having trouble sitting on his anger, but he managed it. "Well," he said, "it's a sad day. I was very fond of your father."

"Yes," John said, just the faintest trace of venom in his voice.

"You know about his giving Hartwell the house?" Ezra said.

"We know, Ezra," John said. The edge was still there in his tone, and Ezra saw that both of them were visibly struggling to keep from anger. Good, we're all angry, he thought, that will make it easier. In a way he felt sad; there was little enough triumph in revenge. They had wanted to embarrass him, perhaps even ruin him, but the old man had thwarted them with what had been almost his last action. Now John and James were waiting for Ezra to apply the lash, and their anger rose from their inability to face the humiliation. They were afraid and he could see it.

"Boys," he said. "I don't want to make this difficult for you."

"Really?" James said, the sneer only just suppressed.

"I want to find a way out of all this that will be best for everyone," Ezra went on. "I don't want Fairacres. Neither does your sister. We want it to stay in the family's hands, just the same."

"It is gracious of you to be so generous with our home," John said silkily.

Ezra smiled. They wouldn't get him to rise so easily as that.

"Let me make you a proposition," he said. "I will sign Fairacres over to you both for your lifetime. In exchange, I want you to sign over to me, for my lifetime, Papa John's shares in Carver Shipping."

"The shares are worth more than the plantation!" John said. "Are you trying to make fools of us?"

"No, John, you do sufficiently well on your own," Ezra said, wearily. "Accept the offer. It's unquestionably the best one you will get."

"And if we refuse?"

"Then I will sell every share I own in Carver Shipping,"

Ezra said, his voice deliberately unemotional. "I will force the price of your shares so low that you will have trouble giving them away. Then I will see Fairacres sold over your heads at auction. Believe me, boys, I'll do it all, without the slightest compunction, if you don't do exactly what I say."

"By God!" John exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "I believe you would, you scoundrell!"

"Count on it!" Ezra said, unmoved.

"I'll not sit and be blackguarded like this!" John shouted. "Come, James, we'll find someone who'll put this damned scalawag in his place once and for all!"

"You won't," Ezra said, and there was such certainty and force in the way he said it that John stopped in his tracks. "I have all the cards, John. You have nothing."

"I'm damned if I'll be robbed!" John shouted, his face purple.

"You're not only wrong," Ezra said, without the slightest change in his demeanor, "you're wrong at the top of your voice!"

John glared at him for a moment and then a slight frown appeared on his forehead. Indecision chased uncertainty across his features. He made no further sound, and Ezra knew that the fight was over. They would do what he had said they would do, and that was all there was to that.

"See yourselves out," he said, getting up and brushing past them. He was finished with them and had no more inclination to talk to them now than he would have had to talk to a dog. "I'm going upstairs to see my wife."

When he came downstairs again they were gone.

She died in the summer of 1856. It had been a wet and dismal spring, and the New York streets remained muddy well into July. The trees dripped constantly with newly fallen rain. People were short-tempered and sometimes came to blows when jostled in the street or in the rush for an omnibus. Ezra's plans lay fallow; he neglected business more and more to be with his wife. As the date of her confinement drew nearer it seemed to Ezra that she grew

paler; her skin appeared almost transparent. He sat with her through long, silent hours in which she slept as though dead, her thin fingers tightly interlaced with his.

He was dismayed by her sickness, angered somehow that she could not or would not fight it, moved at one moment by pity and love and another by impatience and distaste. For the first time in his life Ezra was unable to control destiny and he resented it. He was being forced to contemplate a future bleak with the absence of the wife whose presence he had taken for granted. She ran his household and the background details of his life without his ever having to think about them, providing the complete freedom from domestic arrangements that he seemed to need. He knew now that when she had asked his advice about curtains, or cushions, or wallpapers, or baby clothes, it was out of her need to share her life with him as he tried to share his with her. She had failed because he did not want to understand, just as he had failed because she could not. He shook his head and looked down at the sleeping woman with gentle eyes. If only we could all learn to tell each other what we need, he thought.

Instead, he told her the cheerful parts of Theo's news from California, omitting his brother's maudlin account of his fruitless search for Sarah Malone. Friends who had seen Theo in California told Ezra that his brother was drinking heavily and letting his business slide. Ezra knew he ought to go out to California and see what he could do, but he would not, could not, leave Jane. She clung to his presence more desperately now than ever before. It was as though she believed that if he went away she would slip completely out of life.

"I want you to call the baby Huntingdon," she said one day. "I want him to be named for my grandfather."

"Of course," he said gently.

"Promise," Jane said, half-rising from her bed. "Promise me." It was as if what she was asking were the most important thing in life. Surprised at her vehemence, Ezra held her close for a moment before settling her gently back upon the pillows. Her body felt so frail, so very frail, that he could have wept.

"There, there," he said. "Of course we'll call him after

your grandfather if that's what you want. If you're so sure it will be a boy?"

"Oh, Ezra," she said softly. "If only you had needed me."

"What?" he said. "What do you mean?"

"I do love you," she said, and fell asleep as she spoke, closing her eyes like a child as she so often did these days and sliding into unconsciousness. After a while Ezra kissed her pallid brow and crept silently from the room, shaken by her sad question. Oh God, he thought, I could have loved her more. He sighed; there were so many things which required his urgent attention and he could not concentrate upon any of them. Jane filled all his thoughts; he wondered what he would do if she should die. His mind was full of questions no one could answer.

"We can only do so much to help, Mr. Carver," the doctors said. "After that it's really up to your wife. She has to have the will to get better."

"And you think she does not?"

"Frankly, Mr. Carver, we're not sure what to think," they said. He was tempted to rage at them, to demand why they did not know what to think. Wasn't that why he was paying them their exorbitant fees? What was the point of their training and their equipment and their medicines, what was the point of their jargon and all the rest of it if they could not discover what was so relentlessly drawing out of Jane her desire to live?

July turned to August. One fine, sunny afternoon they sent for Ezra at his office, bidding him return immediately to the house where Jane was in labor. He sat sweating and cursing in the cab as it wove its way through the traffic. He never hated New York more than at that moment; it was as if the streets themselves were his enemies. The doctors were waiting for him as he burst in through the door, cape afly, hatless, breathless. He was too late; Jane was already dead. Giving life to their second son had taken all she had left to give.

With a face like iron, Ezra went up the stairs to the room in which she lay. Shackled in agony, he sat down beside the bed and looked at her sad, thinned face. Jane lay there, utterly present, totally absent. He touched her

hands, the same hands which had caressed him a thousand times and a thousand more. Her face, her lips were the same that he had kissed so many times in kindness, in hope; and yet they were no longer Jane. He sat there until the doctors came up the stairs on silent feet and begged him to come away. It had gone dark; he had not noticed. They whispered something about the will of God and he thundered at them to be gone and take their damned God with them. He wanted nothing to do with any God who would kill anything so lovely so slowly and so relentlessly.

He went through the dreary ritual of the funeral dry-eyed and stoic. Only once, when the first clods of earth banged on the top of the coffin with a sound as final as any a man ever hears, did his face change expression. When he left the cemetery he locked and bolted the door of the room in his memory where Jane rested. He never opened it again.

As for the tiny thing that had cost his wife her life by coming into the world, he was indifferent to it. He kept his promise to Jane and called the baby Huntingdon. He made all the necessary arrangements: nurses, toys, schools, all of that. He told the people charged with bringing up his son that he did not want to see him any more than was strictly necessary, or have anything to do with him that he did not need to do. Ezra Carver knew he would never be able to look at Huntingdon without remembering Jane, and remembering Jane would never be less than infinitely sad.

He buried himself in his work, travelling across the country as though it were no more than a busy street, looking after Theo's disarrayed affairs as well as his own. If before Ezra Carver had inspired respect from those who watched his progress, he now drew gasps of awe. He pursued his own future with the single-minded determination of a fanatic. Few could even emulate him; nobody at all could match him.

He had seen the signs in the mid-West. Illinois, Ohio and Indiana were growing by leaps and bounds as settlers moved into the lands alongside the railroads. What was happening there now would happen further west in another

few years, and when it happened, Ezra Carver wanted to be ready for it.

So summer turned to fall and summer again. In California Theo was back on his feet; things were booming in San Francisco. Theo's friend Ralston, the young financier, had some very promising ideas. And more and more and more. Ezra buried all his regrets and all his private griefs in work and more work, exercising them in activity so intense that he did not notice the passage of the years. He closed his eyes and his mind to women. He saw his children when he had to, allowing himself to feel no affection towards them whatsoever. They reminded him of Jane and he avoided that hurt as the burned child avoids fire. For a dozen years and more there was no thought of love in his life at all.

Ezra decided quite early on that he didn't like William Sharon. The man had the snaky eyes of a four-flusher. He was Ralston's representative in Virginia City, responsible for the operations of the Bank of California in the Territory of Nevada. He was a pale little man with a large head, ladylike hands and feet, a receding hairline and a goatee beard. Ezra found himself constantly irritated by Sharon's assumption of superior knowledge. His face in repose, Ezra decided, bore the expression of a man who has slept with your wife.

"I'm convinced it's temporary," Sharon was saying. "Every mining man who's been up here says there's still a fortune under the ground."

"Have any of them come up with an estimate of what it will cost to get it out?"

"God alone knows," Theo said. "Deidesheimer reckons anything up to three millions just to keep things going."

Ezra looked at his brother across the table. Theo had changed during the last half dozen years. Nearing forty, he was an imposing figure, broad-shouldered and handsome full of confidence and brimming with energy. With the flamboyant Ralston he was riding the crest of a successful wave of investment and expansion, and the setback which the Nevada mines were presently undergoing had seemed to him to be an opportunity of the best kind. For a piddling investment, three or four millions, they could keep Virginia City alive. Once the treasure which all the

experts were convinced still lay underground was found, that investment would multiply ten, twenty, thirtyfold. His enthusiasm, Ralston's, had infected Ezra. That was why he had gone to San Francisco: to hear more and see everything.

The town he remembered from before the war was now truly a city. Still raw, perhaps, but solid, settled, secure. Everything in San Francisco was booming. Elaborate houses were being built in the swankier sections of town. The well-to-do bought their "cassimere" suits at Robert Atkins's establishment on the corner of Clay and Montgomery Street, *objets d'art* and bric-à-brac for their ornate palaces at Shreves or at Tobin & Duncan's Chinese Sale Room. They bought their Krug champagne from Hellman's on Front Street, and dined on lobster at Delmonico's. They bought their Havana cigars from Poppe's, took the horse car from Portsmouth Square out to the beach and the new Cliff House, and generally congratulated themselves on the fact that New York dressed better than Paris and San Francisco dressed better than New York.

After such luxuries Virginia City was raw, brutish and ugly. The town was clamped to the face of the canyon like a sore on a cowhide, crude and dirty. The streets ran parallel to the hillside, named with only the first letters of the alphabet. The downhill streets were little more than excavated trenches. The sidewalks were jammed with humanity of every race and aspect. The main thoroughfare, B Street, was a kaleidoscopic disarray, a town dump over which giant ants swarmed, shacks and tinpot stores jammed between more imposing brick buildings. Mining equipment and saddlery, pots and pans, buckets and baths hung outside the stores in clattering profusion, while the noise from the streets, packed solid with animals and men, carts and wagons and coaches, horses and mules and yapping curs at which men kicked and cursed, was almost tangible. Behind all this, omnipresent, overlaying every other sound, was the deep, constant, solid throbbing thump of the underground piledrivers. Steam engines hissed, smokestacks blackened the sky, quartz batteries battered, and hammers hammered. Carpenters sawed and nailed, storekeepers trundled goods in and out of their shops, fruit

vendors yelled along the boardwalks, organ grinders played, auctioneers shouted hoarsely at pathetic crowds, whores shrieked in the bars, newspaper sellers ran dodging through the crowds shouting "Extry, extry!"

"Is it always like this?" Ezra shouted at Theo as they came up the hill and saw the town spilled over the ground below and before them.

"No," Theo grinned. "It's usually a bit noisy!"

They met some of the local businessmen, most of them in mining. Ezra soon became accustomed to the fact that they all seemed absurdly proud of this awful mark on the land. In full view of the most barren, blasted and desolate country on the face of the earth, they appealed to him to admire its fertile soil and beautiful scenery. Amid noise that would have shamed the Tower of Babel, he was invited to note how peaceful the town was. Public morals were strictly observed, he was told, as if none of those present had ever even seen one of the thousand whores or the thirty brothels on the main street alone. Even though he was prepared to believe that Virginia City was a remarkably quick-growing town, it was hard to take seriously one man's remark that, compared with B Street, Montgomery Street in San Francisco was nowhere any more. B Street was paved with a mixture consisting of what appeared to be equal parts of dust, mud, splintered planks, old boots, tin cans and playing cards. The hotels were all dirty, ill kept, and staffed by illiterate and ill-mannered waiters, and furiously expensive. Necessary evils; Ezra Carver would suffer them all if he had to, and in Virginia City there was little choice.

The town's problems were simultaneously very simple and very, very complex. The gold and silver were there, no question of that. Getting them out, however, would be something else again. They were buried so deep beneath the slopes of Mount Davidson and Gold Hill that a whole new expertise in deep tunnelling and mining had had to be invented. As the shafts and stopes sank deeper and deeper, the risks of cave-ins proportionately increased. It was at this point that a young mining engineer named Phil Deidesheimer, the same man with whom Sharon was now consulting, had hit upon a method of timbering which

was proving successful. Ezra made a mental note that there might well be a sizeable secondary trade in supplying timber to the mines in due course.

Now, after five years in which the mines had yielded up around forty-five million dollars worth of precious ore, they were in serious difficulty. The tunnels were incredibly hot—the water in the bottom of the Yellow Jacket Mine sometimes got to 170° Fahrenheit. Even the strongest miners could only work fifteen minutes at a time in the lower levels before having to be hauled out and revived for forty-five minutes under cool air blowers. The daily allocation of ice was prodigious: Phil Deidesheimer said some of the mines put it at ninety-five pounds per miner per day. Ezra made another note.

"Many of the mines are unworkable," Ralston said. "In others, the silver has given way to borrasca. It's going to take a whole new generation of machinery and investment to make them productive again."

"Quite a few of them are closing down," Sharon added. "The rest are trying to raise capital by reassessing their shareholders. None of them is getting very far."

"But you still contend there's more gold down there?"

"I'm sure of it," Sharon said, answering Ezra's question with a conviction he could hardly have been feeling.

"What do you propose?" Ezra asked, looking at Theo.

"Bill suggests that the Bank of California finances the mine owners."

"And we—?"

"Participate," Ralston said. "If the bank offers the mine owners loans at rates they can repay, say, one or two per cent below the prevailing interest rates, we'd want you in, Carver. We want to put the business back on a sound footing."

"Why do you need me?" Ezra asked.

"It avoids the possibility of our being accused of trying to establish a monopoly," Sharon said smoothly.

Ezra smiled, and they all smiled back. Sharks, every damn one of them, he thought. Every damn one of us, he then corrected himself. We all want the same thing. He asked another question.

"Three and a half millions," Ralston said.

"For how long?"

"Hard to say," Sharon put in. "A year, two, maybe three at the very outside."

"Three years," Ezra mused aloud. "At the end of which the net return might be a handful of worthless stocks and a pile of rock."

"That's the gamble," Ralston said.

"Let me sleep on it," Ezra replied, getting up.

He went back to his room at the International Hotel and had a bottle of brandy sent up. He sat at the window and looked out over the unlovely huddle of the town, the knotted, raucous crowds of people in the street below. He thought about William Chapman Ralston. He had done some checking on Mr. Ralston and Mr. Ralston was some degrees more flamboyant than Ezra liked in a partner, whatever the business. Mining stocks were a lot more volatile than most, and it seemed to Ezra that Bill Ralston was just that shade *too* pushy, too brash, too ambitious and, most of all, too big in the mouth department. As a banker he would not last a week in the conservative East, but of course it was a lot different in pushy, head-long San Francisco. In such surroundings Ralston would seem the very embodiment of some Grecian patron, selflessly benefiting his fellow man. Ezra doubted that Ralston, for all his patronage of the arts and the industries of California, was quite that selfless. He had come all the way up, Ezra knew, and he respected him for it, as he respected any man who had climbed the ladder rung by rung. Ralston had begun life as a bartender on a Mississippi riverboat, and had arrived in San Francisco in 1853 as the agent of a New York steamship line. This common interest had made it natural that he and Theodore compare notes occasionally, and they had kept in touch when Ralston had gone into banking. A lot of fly-by-nights had done that in the 'fifties, Ezra remembered, when there were more "banks" on Montgomery Street than flies on a dead mule. Ralston had become "legitimate" in 1858, when he became a partner in Donahue, Ralston & Co. He and Theodore had found themselves in the same

boat once or twice, and learned how to row in tandem to a profitable shore. They had turned into quite a good team, Ezra had to admit, their ventures usually highly successful. Nevertheless, he felt uneasy; something about Ralston, about the snake-eyed Sharon and their third partner, the humorless Darius Mills, sounded faint bells of warning in Ezra's head.

"I'll tell you what I think they're going to do," he said to Theo that night. "I think they'll corner the loan market, and hold on to the stocks. I don't think they want the mining situation to improve, not yet, anyway. They'll wait until these people are on their knees, and then foreclose. They'll make all sorts of sympathetic noises, but they'll foreclose anyway."

"Can't agree with that, Ez," Theo said. "Just can't. Bill Ralston's not the type to sit on his backside with an investment of three or four million dollars doing nothing."

"It wouldn't be his," Ezra pointed out. "It would be ours."

"Some of it." Theo said. "Only some of it."

"Enough," Ezra remarked. "Do you trust him?"

The waiter brought the bottle of imported French wine across to their table in a little wicker basket, and Ezra almost laughed aloud at the pretentiousness of it. The International Hotel was grandly named, but by real international standards it was little more than a wayside tavern. Even so, it boasted a wine list that would have done credit to the best hotel in New York, and prices even higher. It had somehow seemed in keeping with this entire expedition that Ezra order a bottle of Château Margaux '58. He went through the silly ritual of smelling the cork and sipping the wine, nodding to the waiter. The man had black crescents of dirt beneath his fingernails. He poured two glasses of wine and went away. Theo pushed his glass impatiently aside and leaned forward.

"You asked me if I trust Ralston," he said. "The inference is that you do not."

"Tell me about the Union Mill and Mining Company," Ezra said, by way of reply.

"Union what? I don't know of any company called that."

"Strange," Ezra said with the thinnest of smiles. "Your friend Ralston and his partners are directors of it."

"They're directors of two dozen companies, Ez," Theo protested. "It doesn't signify anything."

"I think it does," Ezra said. "Shall I tell you what?"

"I think you'd better," Theo said. "I think you'd better also keep it in mind that Bill Ralston is a friend of mine. I'm not going to sit still while you slander him, Ez, even if you are my brother."

"You trust me?" Ezra asked. When Theo nodded, he nodded too. "Then hear me out. If it's slander, I'll retract it."

"Fair enough," Theo said, leaning back in his chair. He sipped the fine Bordeaux wine and thought that Ezra had always had a discerning palate. He wondered where he'd learned it all. Ez had come a long way since they'd started out buying hardware to ship to California in 1849.

"As I said, I suspect your friend Ralston is going to corner the mining shares," Ezra said. "He can get control of Nevada silver for about a tenth of what it's worth. If it's there, and the experts seem to think it is."

"That's good business," Theo said. "There's no reason to think he'd divert profits away from the bank. Or us."

"Perhaps not," Ezra said. "I just wonder what Union Mill and Mining is for if not for that very purpose."

"I can't accept that," Theo said.

"It's our three million, Theo," Ezra said. "If Ralston and the others plan to divert the mining business to Union Mill at the expense of the mine owners and the bank, we won't see a red cent."

"They're matching us dollar for dollar," Theo protested. "They don't really need our money—they can raise ten times what we're putting in on their own. There are a dozen men in San Francisco who would jump at the chance. We're getting in on the ground floor because I know Bill and he knows me."

"I don't doubt it," Ezra said. "But I still don't like the smell of it. Fishy. Just a faint bit fishy."

"Dammit, Ez, it's the chance of a lifetime!" Theo protested.

"No," Ezra said.

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"I'm not going in, Theo. I think you ought to pull out, too."

"Pull out?" Theo said, astonished. "Pull out?"

"Yes. Out of this. Away from Ralston. It's a bubble, Theo. One day it will burst with a hell of a pop."

"Nonsense!" Theo said. "You're talking like a fool, Ez."

"Maybe," Ezra said. "You're entitled to your opinion, too."

They sat for a moment not quite glaring at each other, but each angered for his own reasons. The waiter wheeled the trolley to their table and served the first course and they remained in boiling silence until he had gone away.

"So, you don't want to come in," Theo said. "Very well. I'll go it alone."

"All right," Ezra said. "But before you decide, I've got a proposition for you to think over. I'm going into the railroad business and I want you to come in with me."

"Railroads?" Theo said. He looked at his brother in astonishment for a moment, and then he leaned back in his chair and burst out laughing, the hearty, unashamed laughter of a man watching clowns pour water down each others' trousers.

"You're not . . . you're not serious?" he said at last.

"Yes I am," Ezra said. "And I'll tell you why."

On July 2nd, he told Theodore, Congress had granted a charter to yet another transcontinental railroad, this time the Northern Pacific. It conferred forty-seven million acres of land upon the railroad's moving spirit, a former Boston lecturer named Josiah Perham whom Ezra knew to be a charlatan and a fool. Perham, who had grandiloquently dubbed his project "The People's Pacific Railroad," claimed he would raise the money for its construction from Lake Superior to Portland, Oregon, through a form of "people's capitalism." He was proposing to offer a bond of \$100 value to each of one million Americans. The proposition was just barmy enough to sound feasible, and if nothing else it was a politician's dream. Perham suddenly found himself surrounded by friends, even though cynical Washington opinion dismissed the

whole scheme as a pipe-dream. The vote-catchers would use it and discard it, they said. The money would disappear into the usual carpetbags, as so much of the money generated by railroad projects did. The Northern Pacific would never be built—at least, not by Josiah Perham.

Just the same, Ezra said, Congress had voted Perham a vast amount of land, land which might well contain mineral wealth of the proportions of Virginia City and Pike's Peak combined, land which farmers might buy, which developers might covet—if a railroad could be built across it. The end of the war was on the horizon. When it ended people would be looking towards the West as they had always done.

"When they start to move," Ezra said, "they'll need something to ride on. I tell you, Theo, there are more millions in this than anything ever in the history of this country!"

Theodore looked at his brother and pursed his lips. Ezra was brilliant and surefooted. He very rarely made a wrong bet and when he did he corrected instantly. He had been Theo's partner, mentor and friend, even though he was the younger of the two of them. They had never quarrelled—although they had never done anything but argue—and never once disagreed about money. Yet in this railroad nonsense Theo knew that Ezra was as wrong as he ever would be. He said exactly that.

"Again, I'll say maybe," Ezra said. "But it's got a certain future, Theo. I'm not sure Ralston has."

"He won't bust," Theo said.

"I hope you're right," Ezra said. There was an awkward silence between them. The food lay untouched in the dishes before them. Neither of them wanted to say what next had to be said.

"We dissolve our partnership then?" Ezra said at last.

"Well," Theo said, looking up at the ceiling and blowing his nose gustily. "It looks that way, doesn't it?"

"I'll leave tomorrow," Ezra said. "You'll tell Ralston?"

"I'll tell him," Theo said. "I'm sorry you feel this way, Ez. I think railroads are a bust. I wish you had time to talk to old Mark Hopkins and Collis Huntington. They'd tell you."

"I'll see them in Washington anyway," Ezra said. "They can tell me there. And Theo—?"

"What?"

"Take my advice: don't put all your eggs into this one basket. With Ralston, I mean."

"Look, Ez, you've had your say about Ralston. I don't think you need to go on."

Ezra shrugged. There was nothing he could do. He had always followed his own star and so far he had been right. He was not going to change his ways for a fast-talking hustler like William Ralston.

"I'll talk to the lawyers when I get back east," he said. "They can start sorting things out."

"All right," Theo said. He wished there was something he could say. He wished it was like the old days, when it had all been improvised, when he would throw his arm around Ezra's shoulders and laugh about what they were going to do next. Ez wasn't any more the little boy who used to shout "Fraid o' nothing!" when anyone asked him if he was scared of the bogymen. He wasn't any more the smart, ambitious kid he'd been ten or fifteen years ago. Ezra was a strong-willed, relentless man, a maker and breaker of things. He had taken Carver Shipping and built it into an empire. He had almost singlehandedly revolutionized transportation from the East to California. They said he had made another small fortune running arms and supplies during the war. Theo had once asked Ezra if he was happy.

"Tell me what it is," Ezra said, "and I'll tell you if I am."

Just the same, Theo felt his own enormous debt to his brother. Ezra had kept him afloat during the two bad years after Sarah disappeared, years in which Theo searched and searched for her without success. The two years ended at the bottom of the bottle, with Theo a drunken, morose shadow of his former self. Ezra had picked him up and got him straightened out again, always there, infinitely patient and kind. Yet he had done it without ever once displaying camaraderie or affection, as though every movement was as carefully judged as it would have been were the matter purely a business trans-

action. Maybe they left something out when they put him together, Theo thought.

"You—you won't reconsider?" he said. It was the best he could manage. Even his own brother wasn't going to see him beg. Once, yes. Not any more. "Perhaps take a little time to think it over?"

"No," Ezra said, "I've made up my mind, Theo. As, it seems, have you."

"Yes," Theodore said. "I'll stick with Ralston."

"So be it," Ezra said, getting up from the table. His voice was gruff and he squeezed Theo's shoulder as he went by. Theodore watched him walk out of the dining-room, a puzzled frown creasing his features. It was only when, head down, Ezra almost collided with a burly miner coming in from the lobby that Theo realized that for the first time he could recall he had seen Ezra actually gripped by emotion. He shook his head and called the waiter over.

"Bring me a bottle of Krug Sec," he said. "Right away!"

He sat staring at the tablecloth. He decided to get very drunk. It seemed fitting, somehow, to do so on the most expensive champagne that money could buy. When he had finished the bottle he left the International Hotel and walked up B Street, seeing nothing. Twenty minutes later he was ordering more champagne at Julia Bulette's house. He was still in bed with a Creole girl named Lou when Ezra left Virginia City the next morning, on his way back east to buy himself a railroad.

"Well, Judah," Ezra said. "It's good to see you again."

"Indeed, Mr. Carver," Judah Harvey replied. "It's been a long time."

"You must tell me what you've been doing," Ezra said, sitting down in an ornate chair facing Harvey. The engineer realized that the position of the chair had been chosen on purpose. Ezra Carver had his back to a tall window, the bright sun behind him making his expression difficult to see. So it's to be like that, is it? Harvey thought.

"You've been busy," Ezra Carver went on, his voice displaying not the slightest inflection of interest. Judah Harvey allowed himself a small, private smile. Decades might come and go, wars rage across the land, kingdoms crumble. Ezra Carver was still the same steel-hearted sonofabitch everyone had always said he was.

"I've been in California," Harvey said. "Surveying a road out there."

"Oh, yes, I remember now," Ezra said. "My brother mentioned it."

What you mean is that Theo Carver told you everything he could find out about me and about my involvement in the Folsom and Sacramento Railroad, Harvey thought. Not that there was all that much for him to find out. The promoters of the railroad, Colonel Charles B. Devereaux and another Kentucky colonel named Bligh, who claimed family ties with the captain of the *Bounty*, had asked Judah Harvey to survey a line projected to run from

Marysville to Sacramento. The idea was to provide a means of freighting goods to Devereaux' boats at Sacramento, thus putting the wagon lines plying that route out of business. Harvey did his survey, and estimated that the whole track could be laid and equipped with rolling stock for a sum of around \$45,000 a mile, or a total of \$2,700,000. After making a rough count of the wagons plying the same sixty-mile route, Judah estimated that in the first year the freighting would bring in revenue roughly equal to the cost of building the line, with profits running at about fifty per cent of that figure every year thereafter. It sounded like a cinch, and so the Folsom and Sacramento went into business, hiring the construction firm of Seymour, Robinson to begin grading work immediately. Within four months Devereaux and his partner ran out of money. The Robinson brothers attached their tracks and equipment as security for their contract and put in a new board of directors whose first action was to fire Judah Harvey. This made it look as if it had been his over-optimism which had brought about the collapse of the F. & S. and Harvey had come back east, mad as a hornet. He was still optimistic of his chances of becoming associated with a successful railroad, but Judah Harvey was a realist, too. He knew that the story of his association with the F. & S. hung round his neck like an albatross.

"Not the most successful venture I ever made, Mr. Carver," he said, with just a small, wry smile. Ezra nodded, his face the face of a man who not only understands but makes no judgement, one way or the other.

"What will you drink, Judah?" he asked, a shade too heartily. "I've a fine champagne here—a Moët et Chandon Grand Cremant Imperial that I can heartily endorse. There's a decent amontillado if you'd prefer it. Or something lighter? A Montrachet? A Rauenthaler?"

"Thank you, nothing," Judah said. He'd heard that Carver was spending money like a sailor on shore leave in Hong Kong, asking endless questions about the building of railroads. Ezra Carver was reputed to be a man who did precisely what he had in mind. Certainly he lived life to the hilt. Judah Harvey wondered what this house he was sitting in was worth.

"Smoke?" Ezra Carver said, offering him a humidor of cigars. The rich, earthy smell of the Havanas stung Judah's nose and he sighed. He'd given up smoking a couple of years before, when the doctors told him that until he did his lungs would never heal. Not a day passed that he did not long for the clawing bite of tobacco smoke in his throat.

"I don't, thanks," he said, watching enviously as Ezra Carver trimmed the fat cigar with a gold cutter attached to the heavy chain looped across his vest. I'll bet his watch weighs four or five ounces, Judah thought.

"You're sure there's nothing I can get you?" Ezra asked. "Some smoked salmon, perhaps? I believe there's some Beluga—"

"No, thank you," Judah said. "If you could tell me—"

"What this is all about?" Ezra smiled. "Certainly, certainly. It's railroads, of course."

"Of course," Judah said.

"You said something to me a long time ago," Ezra said. "Stuck in my mind. It was when you came to dinner, at our house in Boston. My brother was there."

"I remember," Judah said. "I enjoyed it tremendously." Liar, he told himself. You felt patronized and used and you resented it then and you still resent it.

"Do you remember what you told us that night?"

"To be perfectly honest, Mr. Carver, I do not."

"I'll refresh your memory, then," Ezra said. "You told us, my brother and me—"

"Theodore?"

"Very good," Ezra smiled. "He's still out there in California."

"I know," Judah said, thinking, you old fraud.

"You've kept track of us, then?"

"It would be hard not to, Mr. Carver," Judah said truthfully. "No one in business could fail to be aware of your career. You have a certain, ah, panache."

"Ha!" Ezra said. "Panache! I like that. That's one word for it, eh? And there are plenty of men who resent it."

No wonder, Judah thought. They said Carver had made a packet out of gun-running during the war, and now he was making even sophisticated New York and Wash-

ington sit up and take notice. Even with freebooting the order of the day, Ezra Carver's style stood out from the pack. He had an aptitude for large affairs, a reputation for astuteness and daring. He was almost totally indifferent to public opinion. In a world where even his peers professed one or two principles, Ezra Carver made a point of having none, and making damned sure that everyone knew it. It was difficult to know whether he was totally cynical or totally honest.

He was a good-looking man, Judah thought. So many of them were gross by Ezra Carver's age, but Carver was a fine, solidly built man with shrewd eyes and naturally waved light-brown hair. His complexion was a little too florid for its own good, perhaps, but the man had presence. Some of it was money, of course—Judah reckoned that his host's suit had probably cost more than he had earned in the best two months he had ever worked. As for the rent on the fine old brownstone, that could scarcely be less than substantial. There was no way of living cheaply on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 29th Street. Even so, it wasn't just the money. Ezra Carver wore the air of command, as some good soldiers wear it: comfortably.

"You told us then," Carver was saying, "that you believed there could be a transcontinental railroad even more lucrative than the present Omaha-San Francisco line."

"If it were built, yes," Judah Harvey said. "The desert route."

"Call it the south-western route," Ezra said, smiling. "Investors don't like the word 'desert'." The smile did not warm the cold blue eyes; Judah imagined it rarely did.

"Investors don't care for railroads whenever they're routed, from what I hear, Mr. Carver," he said.

"They will," Ezra said confidently. "And when that day comes, I want to be ready. I want to build that line, Harvey! All the way from Kansas City to California."

"It's a dream, Mr. Carver," Harvey said. "Have you any conception of what such an undertaking would cost?"

"No, I haven't," Ezra said. "That's why I wanted to talk to you. You're an expert."

"Hardly," Judah said. "I don't know that country at all."

"That could soon be remedied," Ezra said. "And I'm prepared to put money where my mouth is, Harvey. I don't expect to pick your brains for nothing. Answer my questions fully and honestly now, and I will pay you five hundred dollars at the end of it."

"Five hundred dollars?" A month's pay for a day's work, Judah thought as he spoke. It would soon be Christmas. There was a beautiful pair of tortoiseshell combs in Stewart's. He'd seen them a few days before and wished he could buy them for Anna. His wife had beautiful auburn hair that cascaded down to her waist when she unpinned it. The sight always aroused him enormously.

"What would you say to that drink now?" Ezra said. His smile was assured, winning. He seemed much less formidable, and somehow easier to like than Judah had expected.

"A glass of sherry then," he heard himself say, surprised at his own words. He normally never drank before evening, and then not more than a glass of wine over dinner. He watched while Ezra Carver poured the sherry from a crystal decanter. Tiffany, of course, Judah thought. The amontillado tasted nutty and smooth.

"Very well, then," he said. "Fire away with your questions."

"Costs first," Ezra said. "Just a rough guess."

"A rough guess is the best I can give you anyway," Judah said, thinking of the route. All across the baking plains of Kansas, and up into the foothills of the Colorado mountains. Down the Sante Fé Trail and then the Rio Grande valley, along the Gila Trail, perhaps, or maybe Jedediah Smith's old trace. His brain raced over thousands of miles, guessing the answers to questions nobody had ever asked.

"Construction alone, just construction, could cost ten thousand a mile, maybe twelve."

"All in?"

"Good God, no," Judah laughed, warming to his subject. He loved the challenge, loved discussing the hypotheses implicit in throwing twin ribbons of steel across empty wilderness. It never failed to excite him, and he stood up, wanting to pace about.

"Look," he said, "have you a decent map?"

"Yes, of course," Ezra said. "Here's one." He unrolled a U.S. Army Topographical Corps map of the country. It was dated 1864. Nothing but the best, Judah thought.

"All right," he said. He took a blacklead from his pocket and put a heavy line on the map, starting at Kansas City and tracing out the route of the Santa Fé Trail, ending at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River. Then he drew a second line, from Independence to Fort Larned, snug in the crook of an elbow of the Sweetwater River in eastern Kansas.

"Either of these two routes, to Larned or Bent's Fort, are relatively simple. The terrain is almost flat, there are no Indian problems worth the name. Construction across this sort of country is easy and cheap. Comparatively speaking."

"Of course," Ezra said.

"So you can build your qualifying forty miles fast, and then by the time you get into the mountains, where it is harder and infinitely more expensive, you have government aid to back you."

"Any idea of costs?"

"Quite low," Judah said. "Say ten thousand a mile for construction. Maybe the same again for rolling stock and equipment."

"You can't be more specific?"

"Without a survey? No."

"All right, go on."

"I'll try to explain, Mr. Carver. In building a right of way there are some rules that cannot be broken. I'll give you a couple of for-instances. No gradient, for instance, can rise more than one hundred and sixteen feet to the mile, for as yet no locomotive exists that can pull wagons up a steeper incline. Indeed, most would be dragged backwards down even so gradual a slope."

"I see," Ezra said. "Anything else?"

"Curves," Judah said. "No curve can have a radius in excess of three hundred feet. Anything smaller and the train will simply leave the track."

He noticed that Ezra Carver was writing down the

figures in a little black notebook. Methodical, he thought, he is methodical.

"Now the distances," he went on. "Assuming that there are no major detours involved, it would be around four hundred miles from Kansas City to Bent's Fort. Add ten per cent for contingencies, call it four hundred and fifty miles. So your construction costs alone for that section would be—"

"Four and a half million dollars," Ezra said harshly.

"Correct," Judah replied cheerfully, enjoying Carver's crest-fallen look. "Now: with rails at about a hundred dollars a ton, and one hundred tons of rail for each mile of track laid—give or take a few tons—and you have—"

"Another four and a half million dollars," Ezra said. "But you're overlooking something."

"What's that?"

"To qualify for federal loans I'd only have to build a tenth of that distance. Forty miles. And there'd be revenue from passengers, freight."

"It will still cost you well over a million in cash," Judah said. "And that would be before you bought your first locomotive. Have you got that kind of ready money, Mr. Carver?"

"I can get it," Ezra said, and Judah believed him.

"Let me play devil's advocate," he said. "You judge that if you build forty miles of road and qualify for government aid, you'll attract investors?"

"That's it," Ezra said. "More or less."

"Then tell me this," Judah said. "Who would invest in a railroad going from Kansas City to nowhere? To some clapboard shanties in the middle of the prairie? Who'd want to go there? Who would have freight to ship back? Mr. Carver, there isn't anybody out there!"

"Then we'll have to persuade them to go," Ezra said. He said it with conviction. Judah frowned and shook his head. He admired push and determination as much as the next man, but this was sheer folly.

"How exactly would you go about doing that?" he said impatiently.

"By finding something people want out there, or providing it," Ezra said. "First rule of business, Harvey."

"It's a good rule as rules go," Judah said, "but it doesn't apply to Kansas. There isn't anybody there, Mr. Carver. The Territory is uninhabited. In fact, some people say it is uninhabitable."

"It will be," Ezra said. "One day." He did not add that it made no difference to him one way or the other. He would be building a railroad with federal aid which made him rich for building more miles of railroad. It didn't matter a damn whether it went anywhere or not, whether anyone was out there or otherwise. But he wasn't about to tell Judah that. He needed Judah now, and that meant he had to trade on the man's passionate belief in the railroad as a civilizing influence that would bring peace and prosperity to the raw frontier.

"Perhaps you're right," he heard Judah say. "But are you prepared to bet one million dollars of your own money now? Today?"

Ezra pursed his lips, and in the silence he looked first at the map and then at Judah Harvey. As if coming to a decision, he nodded.

"Would you work for me?" he said. "Survey the route, if I go ahead?"

Judah's eyes widened. He looked at the lines he had drawn on the map with the crayon, seeing the glimmering steel rails reaching across the land. This was his own dream, cherished and nurtured through years of bad luck and failed ambitions. If he had not actually formulated the ambition to be remembered as the man who had built the south-western railroad, that was what he wanted. He knew, he had always known, that he would never be able to put the project together alone. Men like Ezra Carver had to do that, the money men, the capitalists, the entrepreneurs. Men like himself had all the talent, all the imagination that the Carvers lacked. But it was always the Carvers who had the money. Judah knew he had never been and never would or could be any good with juggling finances, bribing politicians, lobbying in Washington, keeping books. But to go out and plot the course of the south-western railroad! His hands were clammy, and he felt the pounding of his heart. Now or never, he thought, now or never.

"I'll do it," he said, astonished at how calm his voice was. "But I want a directorship, a share in the profits. Not just a salary."

"But of course," Ezra said. His voice was gentle, his smile almost benign. "I had no idea of proposing anything else."

Good Lord, Judah thought, he's accepted. By God, Ezra thought, I've got him! Ezra went across to the table and put both hands flat on the map. There was no warmth at all in the blue eyes.

"Now," he said. "Show me."

Judah Harvey felt trapped, yet he could not fathom how or why. Ezra Carver could not build a single mile of railroad without him, and he knew it. He knew that Ezra Carver knew it. So why did he suddenly feel so ill at ease?

"Well," Ezra said, that smile on his face again. "We're at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas. Where do we go from there?"

With something that might have been the ghost of a sigh, Judah Harvey showed him.

Sarah watched as her husband strode off along Dearborn Street, doffing his wide-brimmed velvet hat to the ladies. He was a fine, handsome man was Kieron Conway, and he knew it. He had bold eyes and a rogue's face. Dressed in his cutaway, frilled shirt and flowing cape, he stood out from the crowd even in a city as cosmopolitan as Chicago. Sarah shook her head and smiled a little sadly. Kieron might be one of the best-known and most successful actor-managers in America, but he was still as transparent to her as a little boy. A little boy, she thought, her smile becoming warmer, going on forty-four years of age this October day of 1871. She watched her husband cross Monroe Street and then turned away. She did not want to see him going into the Tremont House, as she knew he would. He was meeting his mistress there and she did not care to dwell upon that thought.

Kieron's latest conquest was Blanche Treadwell, an *ingénue* who had lately joined the company. Mary Platt, the dresser, had made a point of telling Sarah about the little cottage that Blanche had rented on Lake Street, her eyes beady with malice. There had been no mistaking her intent when she talked about how pleasant it would be for Blanche to have somewhere "nice an' private" to go to. Sarah had shrugged the information aside, as if it had no special significance. She would not give the Platt woman the satisfaction of seeing the pain in her eyes. Damn him! she thought. All these years and still he can hurt

me. She had long since grown an outward shell to turn the points of the daggers of Kieron's infidelities, but to know of them still made her heart ache. It angered her, too, that Kieron's dalliances had become common gossip among the company, and encouraged them all to regard her with a faintly pitying contempt. She resented having to fend off other men who thought they might take his place in her bed.

Kieron's affairs were of no importance: they seldom lasted long. He felt no guilt about them, either during or afterwards, nor over his infidelity to her. Years ago, when she had first found out and demanded angrily that it never happen again, he had laughed at her. Man by nature was a hunting animal, he said. He certainly had no intention of living like a monk, even if she wanted to be a nun. Didn't she see the same sort of thing going on all over the place, especially in the theater?

"You ought to be thankful it's women," he said, as if that somehow excused what he was doing. Sarah believed that sometimes Kieron actually felt the simpering adoration women gave him was no less than his just due. He had been called a genius so often that it was pardonable if once in a while he believed it, and more often acted the part with genuine relish. Kieron had discovered a way of life which permitted him to do exactly what he damned well pleased, and no nagging wife was going to spoil it. He told her he needed these diversions. She had no idea, he said, what the creation of his plays, the writing and the staging, took out of him. Perhaps he even believed that too, she thought, and believed that applause was his inalienable right, whether it was the plaudits of a theater audience or the willing thrusts of some woman's loins.

She did not want to change him, and even if she had wanted to Sarah knew that she could not. She no longer even tried to stop him making a fool of himself. Kieron was Kieron and as long as the Good Lord made pretty women, Kieron would go right on doing it. They all loved his broad-shouldered frame—even in his mid-forties he had the body and bearing of a much younger man—and the haunted eyes set in the face of a fallen archangel. His voice was resonant, his gestures eloquent, his presence

mesmeric. He was rich, handsome and successful, and Sarah knew that these were potent aphrodisiacs, especially in the theater. Kieron was weak where women were concerned, and fell in love as readily as a puppy plays with a ball. For all his faults—and, indeed, for all his virtues—Sarah loved her husband still, as she had loved him since first they met. Sometimes she wondered whether she was fated to fall in love with men she could never completely possess. Sometimes she lay awake in her empty bed and thought of her husband in another woman's arms, and could have killed. Sometimes she blinked back the tears that came without bidding. If there was a flaw in her character that drove her man away, what was it? If there was none, why did he pursue those empty conquests? If he did not love her, why did he always come back? If he did love her why did he ever leave?

She shook her head slightly, irritated with herself for returning to this old threnody. She walked more quickly along State Street. The sky was still streaked with smoke from yesterday's big fire in the West Division. The papers said four square blocks had been destroyed and there had been a great deal of damage. The ruins were still smouldering. Over breakfast Kieron told her that between van Buren and Adams Streets and from Clinton Street to the river nothing stood but Murry Nelson's elevator.

She looked back along State Street. Kieron had disappeared, and she smiled again, sadly now. In her mind's eye she saw him bowing low over Blanche Treadwell's hand, his eyes full of mischief and delight. He was always charming to *them*. Sarah was the one who took the whip edge of his tongue, the cutting sarcasms, the baby sulks when his writing was not going well, the flaring tempers that erupted in an instant and subsided almost as quickly, the petulant anger when she suggested he work instead of playing cards with his cronies or drinking all afternoon in the bar of the Tremont House. All those years, Sarah thought. A long time, a long time. She decided to walk along the east side of the street as far as Field, Leiters. She would windowshop at the store for a little while longer before returning to the house. Nurse would wake her daughter Katie at four, the baby smiling and ready for

her mother's return. Sarah's feet sounded loud on the sidewalk. At least on this side of the street the sidewalks were permanent; across State Street were still the old warped wooden ones which frequently squirted muddy slop through their gaping interstices if one walked unwarily after a shower. Chicagoans laughed when it happened and said that was how you could tell the tourist from the locals.

The windows of all the stores were full of things Sarah did not want. It was strange how one wanted so many things until it was possible to buy anything one wanted. Then it seemed as if the desire melted away. Her reflection stared back at her from the window of a dress shop, a handsome woman in a fashionable black crinoline, figure still good, hair still as black as the wing of a raven, face unlined, hands well kept and slender. Sarah Conway, the famous actress, walking away from love and hurt as she had been doing for years, as she had done so many years before.

She still thought sometimes of Theo. It was hard to forget what had happened in San Francisco, but after a while Sarah had found that she was able to. She had to think hard now to remember what Charlie had looked like. She still had his photograph, but it was like the picture of a passer-by. She forgot him, forgot Theo, forgot California by the simple expedient of burying herself in the work that Frances Ann set for her, devouring it and asking for more until Frances Ann threw up her hands in dismay and refused. No more, she said firmly, until Sarah stopped and talked, rested for one whole day in the soft sunshine.

The house—it was as big as some plantation homes, but they called it a farm—stood on a knoll overlooking the road that led to Gorham and on to Louisville. There were vivid tropical flowers, hibiscus and magnolia and bougainvillaea that turned the sloping garden into a riot of color. Everyone was so kind to Sarah, so kind. It was as if, by declaring her desire to become an actress, she had been issued with some special invisible badge which everyone recognized, everyone respected and supported. Old Uncle Sam Drake was a big, broad-shouldered man, rough-spoken and quickly-tempered, but Sarah soon discovered that his temper was a pose, and that behind it lay a

lovable nature and a warm heart. Every evening the entire family would go out on to the porch as he came up the road from town, striding with the vigor of a man half his age, shaking his head as if surprised to see them all there waiting.

"Well, well, well!" he would boom. "What's all this, then? What brings you all out here to greet an old man?"

And the small children would run to him and burrow in his pockets for candied peel or raisins. The dogs would bounce up and down with delight, and Frances Ann would smile her thin, pleased smile. Sam Drake was boundlessly loved, and the entire family knew no better task than to win his approval. Sometimes he would come and watch Sarah practicing before the huge pier glass in the dining-room, the same gestures over and over again until her arms ached with the weary work of making them perfect. Uncle Sam would smile and nod and say, "Adequate, I'd say, Frances Ann," and Sarah would glow with pride, for Uncle Sam's "adequate" was as another's most effusive praise.

Harmony Farm was a beautiful old house, brick-built, spacious, set on its knoll amid bluegrass meadows and surrounded by the highest hills in all of mid-Kentucky. Roses rambled up the face of the house to the second-storey roof. Indoors, a vast and stately fireplace dominated the dining-room, where visitors dined off English china—blue, plum or green, depending upon Frances Ann's inclination.

After dinner every evening there would be the most lively and spirited conversations. They would talk of the state of the Union, the poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the writings of Washington Irving, and the plays of practically everybody. Uncle Sam was an accomplished raconteur, and Sarah never tired of hearing his stories about the greats and near-greats of the theater, their lives and their rivalries, their failures and their successes. From Uncle Sam she heard stories of Henry Irving and Edwin Forrest, Edwin Davenport in *The Lady of Lyons*, and about Fanny Eisler, whose arrival in Baltimore had caused such a furore in 1840 that the people cut the traces of her

carriage and pulled the dancer from the theater to her hotel, cheering her all the way.

Frances Ann insisted that Sarah try to read one play each day, acting out the cue roles with her. Hours and hours more in front of the pier-glass, learning to match voice inflection to gesture to speech to movement, to use the eyes and body to emphasize what the author had written, to find personality in the printed words. Frances Ann critized everything Sarah did wrongly. Wrong accents, bad pronunciation, awkward or inappropriate gestures, feet or hands badly placed elicited a waspish diatribe.

"Now you mark me well, missy!" she would say. "There is nothing to be said in defense or support of an actress who forgets her lines. *Nothing!* Now pick up your prompt and we shall start again. From the beginning, mind you!"

And Sarah would nod, and start again, her mind empty with fear that she would freeze on the same lines, willing her paralysed brain to project on a screen before her eyes words she did not even remember memorizing.

One day they told her that Julia Dean was coming to visit Harmony Farm. She could not sleep the night before, no one could. Julia was one of the most famous actresses of her generation. Framed playbills of her successes in New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Boston lined the staircase of the farm. Next day the entire house was early a-bustle, maids sweeping the front porch to the accompaniment of a busy clatter of pots in the kitchen. They were all at the windows to see Cousin Julia arrive in the carriage. That evening Sarah listened starry-eyed as Julia recounted the story of her first success, when she had stepped into the leading role in *The Hunchback* at the old Bowery Theater in New York, and become a star overnight.

When she learned of Sarah's aspiration Julia promised to talk to Gerald Norris, the manager of the Placide Company in Charleston, the same one with which she herself had trained. Two months later, her few possessions bundled into a carpetbag, Sarah kissed Frances Ann and Uncle Sam good-bye on the front porch of Harmony Farm. Uncle Sam huffed and puffed as he hugged her, saying, "Hem, hem," and looking up at the sky a lot. The children looked on with spaniel eyes, sad to see Cousin Sarah leave, for

she had become their friend and confidante, a buffer between them and Aunt Frances Ann. Sarah kissed them all and hugged them tightly one by one, her eyes aswim with tears. It was like leaving home, the first home she had ever really known. She would probably have cried had it not been for Frances Ann, and she knew that Frances Ann would have cried had it not been for her.

"Well, missy, remember all you've learned and you won't go far wrong," Frances Ann said, making a noise suspiciously like a sniff. "Even if I say it myself that perhaps should not." Another sniff, or something like one. "Now be on your way, for you've far to go. Let's have no shillyshallying. Theater people have no time to be indulging in emotions; all our lives consist of saying good-bye."

This time she sniffed in earnest, and when Sarah timidly extended her arms Frances Ann gave a sort of strangled squawk and grabbed Sarah, holding her tightly as though she wished never to let go of her, tears coming all unbidden to her eyes and running down her cheeks as if someone had turned on a tap.

"Oh, fiddle!" Frances Ann sniffed. "*Fiddle! Fiddle!*"

Sarah smiled through her own tears, patting Frances Ann's thin shoulders, daughter become mother in the moment of parting. And then, only a moment later, it seemed, Jacob was shaking the reins and the bays were trotting round the gravelled driveway and out through the gates. Ten minutes later Sarah could not see the house. She watched the trees go past the carriage through a blur of tears.

The Placide Company had been founded by an actor whose parents had been world-famous tumblers and tight-rope dancers. Henry Placide was an unutterable snob, his manager Norris not much of an improvement. Someone like Sarah, with no theatrical pedigree at all, was far beneath them, and she was informed quite firmly that it would be a long time before she got any real parts. She did not mind. She loved the bustle of it all, the backstage gossip, the color and constant change. She went to live with Herbert and Catherine Hornblow, two old friends of Uncle Sam Drake's who specialized in character roles. Both were

elderly, and both of them took their role of guardian seriously. Sarah was given little or no time to dally with any of the young actors who made sheep's eyes at her backstage. The Hornblows believed in hard work and saw to it that Sarah had plenty.

There was a young man named Oscar Clendenning working as assistant stage manager whom she grew to know and like. He told her he was inarticulately fond of her and she found that charming. He was tall, and his brilliant blue eyes were full of love and compassion for everyone. He showed her how things worked, so that long before she ever stepped on a stage Sarah knew intimately what was going on behind it.

After almost a year with the Placide Company the Hornblows decided to join Harry Ford's stock company. It was assumed automatically that Sarah would go with them, and so she did, albeit reluctantly. She did not want to leave Oscar, but she had no choice. They left for Baltimore without her even having the chance to say good-bye to him alone. He said he hoped they would meet again some day.

"Maybe one of us'll become famous," he said.

"I hope it's you, Ock," she said. He smiled and shrugged, a big shy man with a heart full of love he did not know how to express.

In Baltimore Sarah worked like a skivvy. She swept the stage after each performance, painted scenery—she was getting adept at painting scenery—and stitched up torn and sweaty tights. She did not mind the long hours or the drudgery or the notional salary she received. She watched each and every performance with eyes lit with zeal, learning from everything that happened onstage, anything. Eventually she graduated to being a super—a walking-on part that did not require her to speak. Her first experience of being onstage was devastating. The flaring oil lamps created a barrier of light that turned the audience into a threatening black mass, a formless thing. She could smell it and hear it and feel its animal presence, but she could not see it. It coughed and spat and shuffled its feet and it laughed and it shouted and it applauded. In between times, hawkers sold it sweetmeats or candies or tobacco or snuff, calling

their wares with a fine disdain for what was going on above them on the stage. It was a Thing, Sarah decided that night, hating It. When she walked off the stage she discovered that her clothing was soaked with perspiration and she could not remember one word of the play in which she had participated.

"I think we know how you feel, child," old Herbert Hornblow told her that evening as they sat in the littered dressing-room.

"I hated them, Uncle," Sarah said sadly. "They were so . . . so crude. The audience is so callous, so indifferent."

"A giant," Herbert Hornblow mused. "I've always thought of the audience as a giant." He took a great bite out of the thick cheese sandwich lying amid the chaos of his makeup kit. "One-eyed, one-eared, many-voiced. We try to make it love us, and sometimes it does. More often it does not. One day you will too, my child."

"Do you think so?" Sarah said, not believing it.

"You trust Herbert, dear," Catherine Hornblow said. "You just take his word for it. I've done that nigh on forty years and never regretted it the once. Have I, my duck?"

"I venture to hope not, my cherub," Hornblow replied.

Thus, slowly, she learned her craft. As the company worked through its repertoire she played every kind of role there was. One night a maid, the next one of Cleopatra's handmaidens, the next week William Tell's son. She used her maiden name, Sarah Hutchinson, and its very anonymity gave her confidence. Harry Ford saw her confidence growing and gave her bigger parts which brought out the promise in her acting. She fitted into the company without causing any dissention. Everyone liked her: she wasn't too proud to carry her own slops bucket, even if she was playing second leads.

Ford was a little gamecock of a man who had once been a bookseller in Richmond, Virginia. He was ambitious and not a little vain, as small men often are. He had great dreams of making his Holliday Street Theater in Baltimore the home of the great stars appearing in the classic plays. But actors of the calibre of Ed Forrest and the Booths asked enormous fees. Even if Harry Ford had been able to pay them, their schedules were such that one had

to book them literally a year ahead. Since Harry never knew from month to month whether he would still be in business a year ahead, that effectively presented an impasse, which his dreams could not surmount. So, instead, he wrote plays, burlesques, or novelty pieces for his own company to perform, adapting what he wrote to the talents available to him.

As Sarah Hutchinson's acting range widened, Ford enlarged the size of her name on his playbills, and re-introduced Shakespearian tragedy into the company's repertoire. He was convinced that it would not be long before Sarah would be able to play Lady Macbeth with as much power and fire as she now played Titania, and he wanted to be selling the tickets when she did.

For herself, Sarah could not have been happier. She loved acting, loved the theater. Nothing about it was a hardship, not the long hours of rehearsal, the poor conditions, the draughty theaters and makeshift scenery, not poor costumes and merely adequate supporting players, not unfunny comedies or comic tragedies. She still lived in Mrs. Peabody's boarding-house on Charles Street with the Hornblows. She put on no airs, no graces. She had a cat named Goneril. Sometimes she was lonely.

Late in 1859 Harry Ford had a stroke of pure luck. He managed to book the Conway Players into the Holliday Street Theater for a limited engagement. They had been performing a new play, *The Streets of San Francisco*, at the Chambers Street Theater in New York, and when it closed they found that a mixup in their bookings gave them two weeks at liberty before they were due to open in Philadelphia. Into this vacuum Harry Ford rushed, persuading Conway to bring his troupe to Baltimore. He returned well pleased with himself: Conway was a great catch, and a real crowd-pleaser. He was manager, resident playwright, and star of the Conway Players, and already, at thirty-two, the darling of the New York audiences. British-born, trained for the Law, they said he could act in anything and write anything. His critics pointed out with some asperity that Conway frequently did both but Conway took but little notice of critics. In fact, when one

aged but much-respected theatrical critic had died, Conway's response to the news had been: "How did they know?"

It was callous and unfeeling but such barbed witticisms were treasured in the theater—and talked about. Conway's wicked tongue made it possible for many a lesser wit to dine out. Everyone knew the reply he had made at a card game when a dowager had asked him how she should play her hand. "Anonymously, madam," he had snapped.

Fast-talking, devil-may-care, they said he played himself onstage, and why not? Audiences loved his repartee, his biting cynicism. In the end nobody knew for sure what Conway had said onstage or in real life, and by and large it didn't make all that much difference. It was always a good story. A Kieron Conway play was a thing of fire and thunder, melodrama and love-scenes intermingled, comedy and tragedy in tandem, "as in real life, my dears," Conway would say. High society in the East or lowlife in the South, country houses in Cork or Cairo, rebellions in India or tomfoolery in the dales of England, all rolled from his pen without apparent effort on Conway's part. "I can spin these rough and tumble things as readily as a hen lays eggs," he once wrote in the *Dramatic Mirror*. When someone asked if this was true, he said in fact it was not true enough. "After all, I rarely get broody," he said.

His critics were quick to remark that Conway's "rough and tumble things" more often than not had their origins in French, German, Italian or Greek classics, but such carping was water off a duck's back. He didn't give a damn whence came his inspiration, Conway said—loudly, frequently, and publicly. Handsome, dashing, controversial, he was a surefire box-office attraction, and he knew it. So did Harry Ford, who lost no time in plastering Baltimore with playbills announcing Conway's performances weeks in advance of the actual event. Conway in a new play by Conway—it was a license to print money!

The Conway Players arrived in Baltimore two days before the opening, and Kieron Conway took a spacious suite at Barnum's, the same one that Mr. Dickens had occupied some fifteen years earlier and praised so highly.

He informed Harry Ford that he would appear for rehearsals at the theater the following day, and bade Harry to have his stock company on hand to be introduced. After all, he said, with a magnanimous smile, it wasn't every day they had the chance to meet real actors. He said it with a smile which robbed the remark of offense. Just.

The stage was bare except for a working light and a couple of bentwood chairs when Conway strode on to it the next morning. He acknowledged the awed deference of the Ford company with a regal nod.

"Ladies," he said. "Gentlemen. I am honored to be among you. I am sure that we shall have many things in common to discuss, and I'll be happy to have you join me for drinks in my suite this evening, if it is convenient for you to do so."

There was an excited murmur of appreciation at Conway's invitation from the players assembled onstage, but Sarah did not contribute to it. She detested Kieron Conway on sight, spurned his cheap triumph over the others. He was just too good-looking, too self-assured, too perfect. Something in her wickedly wanted to upset that poise, that equanimity, that certainty of self. She watched as Conway's eyes moved calculatingly across the faces of the women in the Ford company. His thoughts were as plain as if they had been painted on his face with rouge. We're all supposed to be mares, Sarah thought angrily, and he the stallion. He'll honor one of us, perhaps all of us, if the mood is on him. The vanity of the man! The monumental egotism!

Jimmy Considine, the juvenile, asked Conway whether they might come to see the new play. "We've all heard so much about you, sir," he said. "A visit would surely be instructive to someone with as much to learn about acting as I."

"Save your groats, man!" Conway smiled. "There have to be better things for a young fellow to do of nights—even in Baltimore—than to come and see me cavort like an inebriated chimpanzee!"

Jimmy blushed, shamed in front of everyone by Conway's thoughtless condescension. Sarah felt anger flare in her bosom. Jimmy was a nice boy and it just wasn't fair

to make a fool of him in front of everyone. Worse than that: Conway was not only belittling Jimmy, but also his own work and the profession itself.

"Do you think so little of our opinion, Mr. Conway?" she asked, her voice as sweet as she could make it. "Or is it your own performances you value so poorly?"

Kieron Conway had been turning away as Sarah spoke. He stopped theatrically (Sarah would discover later that he did everything theatrically) and swung round to glare at her. Anger pulsed under his flushed face, and his mouth was clamped tight shut. Good, Sarah thought, and then quailed as Conway's ice-blue eyes fixed on her. His cape swirled out and then down like the wings of some strange bird, and he took a step towards Sarah. Her chin came up, defiance in her very stance. Damn the man, I'm not afraid, she told herself, terrified.

"Ah," Conway said, controlling himself. "And your name, young lady?"

"Sarah Hutchinson," she said, willing her voice not to quaver.

"An actress, of course."

"Yes," Sarah replied. "And a good one."

He feigned to look at her more closely, mastering his anger, becoming the Great Man, generous with the Silly Little Girl who had—inadvertently, no doubt—offered to question his judgement.

"Well," he said chucking her negligently under the chin, "we'll eventually see how good you are."

It was the way he used the words that did it. No one in the draughty hall had the slightest doubt as to the real intent of his double entendre. Sarah's mouth opened in an astonished "O" and Kieron Conway smiled at her, totally confident of his own charm. Sarah slapped him without even thinking.

She heard the indrawn hiss of breath from those watching, saw the dull red mark on Conway's face blossom in slow, slow motion. Everything was silent, frozen. Sarah could not believe what she had done, but she knew she would not have undone it even if she could.

Kieron Conway touched his cheek gently. There was a

light of faint wonder in his eyes, and the smile came slowly back.

"Well," he said, and then again, "Well." He was back in control now and his smile grew wider. "Well, Sarah," he said, a cocky grin replacing the smile, "if you can act well as you slap, you'll go further than Mrs. Siddons!"

He tipped his wide-brimmed hat, and then he was gone in a swirl of cape and a flourish of cane. Harry Ford galloped after him, jabbering apologies which Conway did not even pause to hear. The rest of the company stared at Sarah as if she had just grown horns and a tail.

His real name was Kevin Connelly. His father, a former British army officer, had risen to the rank of captain in the 70th Foot, a battalion raised in Glasgow in 1756. Towards the end of 1819, with Boney locked up on St. Helena, no more wars to fight and more than ten thousand officers in the army on half pay, Canfield Connelly had found himself stationed in Canada with a pregnant wife and no prospects. Longing for a warmer climate and a more comfortable billet, Connelly sold his commission to an officer of the 4th West India Regiment, received the "difference" of three hundred pounds and, on February 17, 1820, sailed for Italy. It was there in a small apartment in Casalecchio di Reno above Bologna, that his second son Kevin was born on March 7, 1827. Later, the family moved to Milan, where in 1832 Canfield Connelly was appointed British Consul. Having pulled every string that it was within his power to pull to get the position, and having not one shot left in his locker, Canfield Connelly retained a leechlike hold upon his appointment for more than a decade. That was long enough for his second son—the first had died in infancy—to attend a boys' school in Blackheath, then rise to boater and blazer at Harrow-on-the-Hill before going on to Lincoln College, Oxford.

He was a winning, handsome lad. Good at everything, popular with the other students, he made plenty of friends at Oxford, got his Blue for rowing. He moved with the right crowd; Henley, private views at the Royal Academy, rooms in Albany. He took advice from the dons and read

Law, hating it. He secretly burned to become a writer, and kept small blue notebooks in which he wrote short synopses of stories, or jotted down impressions of things heard, felt, seen. He had no clear idea of how to use them, only feeling somehow that putting them down on paper fixed the time for ever. In later years he would be able to read them and remember the particular moment at which they were written. He never showed them to anyone.

Kevin's ambition to become a writer horrified his parents, but by the time his ambition became reality old Canfield Connelly was out of favor with the government and out of work to boot. Living on a shoestring in Boulogne, Canfield was in no position to coerce Kevin into anything, and instead gratefully accepted the remittances his son sent across to Europe and diplomatically kept his mouth shut.

It was the merest coincidence that hard on the heels of Kevin's decision to abandon the Law in favor of writing—he was then trying his hand at plays—he should have gone to Brighton. It was a little different from the quiet watering place which had attracted the Prince of Wales so much that he had built an enormous folly there, all minarets and onion domes, in which to spend his summers away from the reeks of London. The town was by then a resort, attracting all kinds of people; ladies in expensive dresses, their delicate skins screened from the sun by brightly colored parasols, promenaded along the sea front next to girls from the bottle-factories of Wapping and the lads from the tanneries of Barking. Hurdy-gurdies played. There was an identifiable and unique aroma in the air, a compound of vinegar and ozone and seaweed and fish. Gulls swooped and fat pigeons waddled deftly between the walkers, alert for crumbs. Dogs barked, children screeched, and over all the sea laid its steady, surging sound. Walking along the Marine Parade towards the little hotel on East Street where he had taken rooms, and enjoying the lusty breezes of the Channel that lightly buffeted him as he progressed, Kevin's attention was attracted to a scene ahead of him.

An elderly man, accompanied by a pretty girl not half his age, had been accosted by two ill-dressed louts, ob-

viously drunk. The pair of them were taunting the old man with coarse remarks about his relationship with the young girl.

"Come on, ducks, come with us," one of them said. "See what it's really like!"

The young woman looked considerably distressed, but the knot of passers-by which was watching this free entertainment was doing nothing to help her, and it was plain that the old man could do little more than protest at the behavior of the two bullies.

"Go on, ducks," the shorter of the two men said, giving the girl a nudge. "Yer don't want ter spend the die with that old groper, nah, do yer?"

"Rather pöcket my red, I'll be bound," the first one leered, and they both burst out laughing. It was at this moment that Kevin came alongside them, and pushed his way through the small crowd.

"It's Mr. Devereaux, isn't it?" he said to the old man.

Charles Devereaux was a well-known actor-manager who ran a highly successful repertory company in London. Although well into his sixties, he was still a very popular character actor. Kevin had seen him once or twice in plays at the Adelphi. Charles Devereaux acknowledged Kevin's interruption with a nervous nod, his eyes still fixed apprehensively on the two louts who were leering at the girl. It was the fixed stare of fear, Kevin knew the old man somehow felt that as long as he kept his eyes on the two men they would not go too far.

Kevin smiled. It was a smile which would later become famous in the theater. Many an actor and actress would remember it with fear and loathing. It was the smile of a shark just before it begins the slow, rolling turn preceding attack, the smile of a predator which forgives its prey its folly, but kills it nonetheless. The two louts were not impressed by it, or by Kevin's interruption. His accent revealed he was a "toff" and his straw boater and striped blazer confirmed that he was an easy mark.

"Push off, Percy!" one of the men said, "'less yer want yer nuts kicked in."

He was short and thickset. The skin over his eyebrows was as scarred as a footpad's, and one of his ears was

cauliflowered. His mate was taller, skinnier, but just as battle-scarred. Both of them were grubby and both stank of cheap porter.

"Excuse me," Kevin said. "You're embarrassing the lady."

"Bugger off, yer snotty git!" the second lout said, giving Kevin a short-armed push.

"Manners," Kevin said reproachfully, and felled the man with a blow. The thickset one looked at Kevin and then at his fallen companion, who lay unmoving on the ground, blood trickling from his mouth.

"'ere," he said, backing away. "'ere!"

"Where?" asked Kevin conversationally. "Here?"

He hit the man with all his strength just below the sternum. The man looked down at his paralyzed belly as though expecting to find it gone. Eyes bulging, mouth working frantically to suck air into his stunned lungs and heart, he sank slowly to his knees, looking up at Kevin in horrified astonishment as a constable pushed through the jabbering crowd of onlookers.

"Nah then nah then nah then," he said, red-faced and self-important. "Wot's all this 'ere, then?"

"Two ruffians scrapping, officer," Kevin said. "I should lock the beggars up if I were you. Lowers the tone, don't you think?"

The policeman took a moment or two to assimilate this. Then, reassured by Kevin's accent and completely unruffled appearance, he tapped the peak of his helmet with a forefinger.

"Leave it to me, sir," he said. "Leave it all to me."

Kevin smiled like an angel and turned to the astonished Charles Devereaux and his pretty charge.

"I say," he said, "wouldn't you just love some tea?"

His body sang with the power in it. The look of sheer adoration in the girl's eyes told him that it would only be a matter of choosing his time and she would be his. It was so easy. He had always been able to play people, to make them do what he wanted, like him or love him—or loathe him. He could make them do that very easily. He always enjoyed it. When someone patted him on the back and said, "Well done, sir," he almost laughed aloud.

Fools, he thought. Idiots, to be so easily manipulated. He had coined a word for the gray masses: sheeple, he called them.

His rescue of Devereaux and Devereaux's niece Lilian, for that was her name, quickly blossomed into a friendship. Devereaux was so impressed with Kevin's sheer "physical presence" (as he called it) that he bombarded Kevin with requests and, later on, opportunities to try his luck on the stage. Kevin refused and refused again, although agreeing to work from time to time on rewrites of plays which had been submitted to Devereaux and were not quite up to snuff. Finally—as much to get away from Lilian as for any other reason—Kevin agreed to try acting. Lilian's blonde and porcelain charms had worn thin very quickly, and she had begun boringly to talk of naught but marriage, something which figured very small in Kevin's plans.

So he changed his name. Kieron Conway sounded more "actory" than the prosaic syllables of his own name, Kevin thought, and he was soon touring the provinces in rep. It was not work to him at all. Acting came to him so naturally that all work was play and all play delight. Where others stumbled and labored over the memorizing of dialogue, Kieron Conway seemed almost to learn at sight. Where others painstakingly plotted each move they must make onstage in order not to fall over the furniture, Kieron danced lightfooted. Where others froze, Kieron ad libbed. It was as if, he thought, he had been touched on the shoulder by God. Imagine being *paid* to do this! Having shared their world, he understood why the poor fools who worked in offices and factories and stores flocked to see such shadow-plays, escapes from the dreary sameness of their every day. He had no pity for them, no sympathy at all. The difference between ordinary people and Kieron Conway was that they were ordinary and he was not. It was as simple as that.

After a year in the provinces—dull, grimy towns with soot in the air and mud in every byway—Kieron grew tired of second billing, tired of supporting a leading man and woman who were not even his equals, let alone his superiors, in dramatic skills. He knew who it was the

audiences were coming to see, and he knew that Robert Prince and Katherine Rainham (born, respectively, Harold Gurley and Ada Pickett) were jealous of the applause which his every entrance drew. He was tired, too, of the constant stream of letters from his family, who felt that his theatrical career was a blot on the family escutcheon.

The deciding factor was a girl in Nottingham. She was a pretty enough little thing to pass the time with; but not a lifetime. Her parents would become impossible (not to say violent) once she told them the truth, and Kieron decided to be elsewhere when she did so.

He sailed for New York two days later on the screw-steamer *Hyperion* out of Liverpool, and found himself a job in A. T. Stewart's store on Broadway, selling clocks. After a while he graduated to the management of the clock department, learning all the catch-phrases and the snob names until he could prate glibly about George Graham's dead-beat escapement, John Harrison's grid-iron pendulum, of the relative differences between English clocks by Tompion and American ones by Eli Terry, of spandrels and sonneries, pilasters and plungers and the rest. He hated every minute of it.

Occupying a small hall room in a boarding-house on West 14th Street that he loathed almost as much as he loathed his fellow clerks at Stewart's—they seemed to think that heaven consisted of becoming a floorwalker—Kieron spent his evenings hanging about at the old Bowery Theater until he got night work as a scene shifter. His pay was six dollars a week. For this princely sum he was expected not only to shift scenery, act as lighting assistant and repair costumes, but to sit in the wings and prompt during the performance. One night the juvenile turned up dead drunk. They got him into his dressing-room where he sat singing tunelessly, smearing makeup on his face with all the finesse of a hippo. They poured hot coffee into him until his face suddenly turned reproachful beneath the caked makeup, and he vomited cataclysmically all over the costume in which he was supposed to make his appearance within the half hour.

"Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph," said the stage manager, a fat and sweaty fellow with what was known in the trade

as a "brewer's goiter," a big beer belly that jounced visibly as he hurried about backstage. "That's all I need."

"Urrrggghhh," said the juvenile, mopping ineffectually at his ruined clothing. "Madellofameess."

"He can't go on," Kieron said, hearing Opportunity positively thundering on the door.

"He's going to just the same," the stage manager said. "If I have to go behind him and hold him up."

"Ucch," said the juvenile and collapsed like a wet rag.

"What was that you were saying?" Kieron asked the fat man.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph," wailed he.

"A good act," Kieron said, "but not right for this spot. How about letting me go on?"

"You?" said the stage manager, whose name was Durgin.

"I can do it," Kieron said. "I know the part inside out. I can wear my own clothes—they're better than his were, anyway!"

He could see it all now. He would go on in the part of the juvenile, take the audience by storm. Tomorrow's papers would be full of it. Some well-known manager would offer him a star part in his next play. From there on it would all be roses. . . .

"Jesus wept," Durgin said, a man at the end of a very limited tether. He looked at Kieron as if for the first time. His eyes were hooded, examining the idea as a dog walks around its food.

"Give me a chance," Kieron said. His whole body was tense, fired with the certainty that if he got this break he would be back where he belonged, on the stage, good-bye to Alexander T. Stewart and his bloody clock department.

"No likely," Durgin said, and marched off to find an understudy. Kieron watched him go as a drowning man might watch a rescue boat sail past without seeing him. He could not believe Durgin had turned him down, and for a moment he was stunned. Then a slow anger began to burn inside him, kindling and growing and spreading, an anger against beer-addled bastards like Charlie Durgin in whose hands all opportunity lay, all the breaks rested, all talent suffered. Stage managers, producers, entrepreneurs, all the ordinary people who worked in the theater

to make money, what the hell did they know about being an actor? They pulled strings, literally or figuratively, but it was the actor who transmuted the base metal of words into the pure gold of drama, spectacle and excitement: theater! The mechanical men knew nothing, nothing! How could they ever appreciate what performing could do to an actor, how it could drain him of all emotion, leaving a vacuum that might take days or hours or weeks to fill? What did they know of the strange mechanisms which enabled him to create new personalities every day, every week? We are the ones who always make it happen, because no one else can, and they do not understand it because they cannot. What is worse, Kieron thought, they don't give a damn.

All this in a second, surging through his brain and boiling over. "Damn you!" he yelled after Durgin's back. "Damn your empty thick Yankee skull!"

Durgin whirled, his bruiser's brow knotting. He'd had more than his share of troubles with posturing mountebanks such as this one before, and he knew how to handle them.

"What did you say?" he growled. "What did you say?"

"I said," Kieron said, suddenly calm, "that you can take your goddamned play, stuff it up your nostril, and blow it right out of your arsel!"

Durgin smiled a broken-toothed smile. Popinjay bastards, he thought, he knew how to handle them. Punch them in their pretty faces and they fell to bits like a broken cup. They were as self-centered and vain as peacocks, the fairy bastards, and they had even less guts. They fainted at the sight of their own claret.

"Well, ya little stir-shit," he growled, advancing on Kieron with his fists raised. Then he hesitated. Kieron had not flinched, and they always flinched. He had not raised his hands, palms outward, to protect his pretty face, and they always did that. In fact, he didn't even look apprehensive, and they always looked apprehensive. Something uncoiled in Durgin's belly, the fear of a man who suspects he may impale himself upon a spike that he cannot see. He hesitated longer, and then it was too late and everyone backstage watching knew it.

"Get out o' here, ya quean!" Durgin shouted. "An' don't come back!"

"Little man," Kieron said, loud enough for the stagehands and actors to hear, "I will come back when I am good and ready. And when I do, little man, my first pleasure will be to kick your backside out of your ear-holes. *Capisci?*"

Then, with the utmost effrontery, he flicked his kid gloves across Durgin's lumpy face and walked away, as straight and proud as a matador who knows the dominated bull to have been fixed. It was a fine moment of contempt, and although Kieron did not know it at the time it was the foundation stone for the legend, the first story among hundreds which would one day make him the most talked-about actor of his time.

Right then, however, it was nothing more than a superb exit, and it left Kieron without even the pleasure of the steady six dollars he had been earning. He knew most of the managers and even more of the actors and actresses, especially the actresses. But that alone was not enough to get him work. There were hundreds of plays being produced, tryouts in theaters all over the city, and he tried diligently to land a part—any sort of part—in one of them, but to no avail. He haunted the offices of the producers and the agents, trudging up and down Broadway and the small streets on either side of it, sitting in smoke-filled offices with hopefuls like himself, specialty and novelty acts, strong men and red-nosed comics, soubrettes and tap dancers, all in search of the actor's holy grail—a part, steady work. He learned the endless litany that all actors learn: don the bright smile, walk in as if you own the world, ask the question all of them ask: anything today? Nothing today, nothing tomorrow, nothing next week, nothing next month. You're too small or you're too tall, too fat or too thin, too early or too late, your accent is too British, you sound too American. Keep the smile pasted on and bow out, thanks a lot, see you again, keep me in mind, close the door. Only outside did the shoulders slump, the despair drown you.

Then one day, quite abruptly, Kieron decided to quit making the rounds. Damn them all, he said to his mirror

as he shaved. That's enough of trying out on empty stages, hearing the disembodied voice from below stop you in mid-speech and say "Thank you, next please!" That's all the slopping up and down town in pouring rain, that's all the stick-on smiles. No more, he thought. If these fools won't give me parts in their plays, I'll take the shorter cut—and write my own.

All at once the future looked brighter. Just the prospect of no longer having to clump up and down those seedy staircases, to brightly enter those dingy offices, was in itself a heady one. Kieron went off and bought pens and pads of ruled foolscap paper and set up a table and chair near the only window of his little room. Look out, world, he thought with that shark's smile on his face—here I come!

For the first time in his life Kieron found that his education was of some benefit to him. He stole from every French, German and British classic that he knew, as shameless as an aged whore. He stole from Aristophanes and Juvenal, he lifted from Jonson and Marlowe, astonished at how easy it was, delighted with his own fecundity. Good God, was writing this easy? No wonder there were so many damned scribblers! Within a year he had his first success. It was a melodrama with Shakespearian pretensions (and not a little genuine, if bowdlerised, Shakespeare) called *Octavian and Cleopatra*. He sold it for a hundred dollars to Tom Flynn, who managed the old Chatham Street Theater, and who in turn succeeded in persuading the well-known tragedian J. Hudson Kirby to play the lead.

Kirby, or "Huddie" as everyone called him (behind his back—he was far too august an old duck to permit anything but a respectful "Mr. Kirby" to his face), was a white-haired, mellifluously voiced old charlatan with nicotine stains on both hands from incessant smoking. He was renowned for his death scenes, which had given rise to the famous tale of the galleryite who often slept during the tamer passages of plays, saying as he settled down for a snooze, "Wake me up when Kirby dies." At Kirby's request, Kieron wrote in a long death scene full of sound and fury, and the play was a big success. Flynn exhorted

Kieron to write another, and then another, shameless *mélanges* of other tragedies in which first Kirby and later many other leading actors would play. Soon Kieron had no need to scribble plays to order at one or two hundred dollars a time. His work attracted the audiences—and the ducats. *Octavian and Cleopatra* passed into deserved oblivion, but not its creator. Within six years Kieron had a dozen, and then twenty, plays to his credit, many of them successes. He was well-known, and he was the friend of the even better-known. He also had a reputation backstage as a play doctor as well as a writer, and a play doctor is one of the best things to be in the theater. There are a lot of things that can be fixed with money in a bad play. It is when brains are needed that it gets tougher, and when brains were needed producers began more and more often to think of Kieron Conway.

The critics, too, were generally kind to his work, despite his much quoted remark to the effect that the first of them must have been a camel, “an offensive beast with the face of a horse and the brain of a snail which will spit in your eye if it does not like you.” They said his female conquests were numberless, to which Kieron remarked, “Gentlemen, if I had slept with as many women as you credit me with, I would not be in the theater but in a jar of formaldehyde at the Smithsonian Institution.”

As Kieron's fortunes prospered, his address improved. He moved to a house on 34th Street, threw elegant soirées. People vied to be invited. He was seen at all the best clubs, mixing with all the right people. Society might look down upon the acting profession—and did—but it could not outdo it in style and panache. Society being society, it did what it always does: joined in, pretending to like it. As for Kieron, he gave not a tinker's cuss. He was having the time of his young life and he did not care who knew it. In 1856, the same week that James King was murdered in San Francisco, Kieron founded his touring company, The Conway Players.

This was the man whom Sarah Hutchinson had so vigorously and unrepentantly slapped. And this was the man who, four stormy years later, she married.

The Conway Players—Kieron would never deign to allow his troupe to be called anything so mundane as a company—opened in Baltimore in a new play written by Conway and called *The Sidewalks of New York*. Since she was “at liberty” Sarah took the opportunity of watching it from the house seat which Harry had given her (under protest, insisting that she ought to be very grateful to him, for he could have sold it at a handsome profit). Sarah knew what Harry meant by “grateful.” Harry’s hands were among the seven wonders of the world, so she was told by the younger members of the company—the only ones which you could plainly see but two of, and yet which were always as busy as a dozen. All actresses trod perforce a fine line between permissiveness and prudery, learning when to flirt and when to flatten. Harry Ford’s ego was brass-covered; no insult, no jibe, no slap deterred him for more than moments. It was as if his groping fingers had independent life.

The Sidewalks of New York was unashamed melodrama and the first-night audience loved it. There was a fire, a snowstorm with a death scene of outrageous melodrama and unashamed sentimentality. The set pieces were superb—detesting Conway, Sarah had to admire his sense of staging and theater—and the audience ate them up with a spoon. As a professional Sarah could, of course, see clearly where Conway was manipulating his audience, with either words or set pieces, but her knowledge made his

skill no less admirable. Both as actor and writer he knew exactly when to make the big gesture, exactly when to have someone shed a tear, and, most importantly of all, he knew how to underplay when he had to. He was sometimes grandiloquent, of course, and tempted too often to over-act, but for a boor and a braggart Sarah had to concede that Kieron Conway knew his business. He was the kind of actor audiences loved, larger than life but still one of them.

The leading lady of Conway Players was a tall handsome woman with patrician features and a mane of chestnut hair. Her name was Jessica Landsborough. Older than Conway by a visible half-decade, endowed with a majestic figure that put Sarah in mind of a galleon in full sail, Jessica Landsborough could not act her way out of a paper bag. Her voice had no range, her face only two or three different expressions, her body but one position. There have been many actresses as limited who have gone on to fame and fortune, but Jessica Landsborough was not one of them. She was too tall—everyone onstage was constantly looking up her nose. The personality she projected was that of an unremitting snob, forced by circumstances to mix with inferiors whom in ordinary life she would have shunned as devils shun holy water. This would have been acceptable, too, had she been playing a patrician lady. She was in fact playing the mother of the tenement family.

The audience patently did not like Mrs. Landsborough, who, once she perceived their dislikes, did not like the audience, either. After her first two or three performances she played the part as stiffly as if she had been frozen before coming on stage. On the fourth evening, standing backstage, Sarah distinctly caught the aroma of whisky beneath the wafted perfume that trailed in clouds behind Mrs. Landsborough like a chiffon scarf as she made her entrance. As an actress, Sarah well knew the folly of bolstering one's courage with alcohol, and it looked as if Mrs. Landsborough had not so much bolstered as anaesthetised hers. The minor hesitations, the small fluffs, the occasional mis-steps as she made a movement downstage or up, all gave her away. Once, moving downstage—the stage actually sloped towards the audience in those days,

so that no detail of the women's costumes be concealed from them—Mrs. Landsborough visibly staggered. She was saved from tottering into the pit by the steely grip of Kieron Conway. He turned her back and almost thrust her where she was supposed to go, smiling all the while. Through clenched teeth he hissed at the actress loudly enough for everyone onstage to hear.

"Leave the bottle alone, you clumsy cow!" he said, "or leave the show!"

Mrs. Landsborough drew up her ample bosom as though she was going to attack Kieron with it, but instead tossed her head, speaking her next line as though he were not there. The atmosphere onstage could have been sliced and sold in sandwiches, and it grew steadily worse. In the second act Mrs. Landsborough dried up completely—the result of a combination of more whisky and growing fear—and the audience hissed the audible prompter. The performance ended in chaos, with one of the *ingénues* in tears and Mrs. Landsborough locked in her dressing-room. Kieron Conway stalked out of the theater in a mood as black as the oil on the hinges of hell. Harry Ford told anyone who'd listen that he would gladly commit suicide if only he had the money to buy a pistol.

The Conway Players had been booked for a two-week engagement, but by the fifth evening the troupe was in total disarray. Harry Ford was trying to summon up the courage to tell Kieron Conway he wished to cancel their engagement, and Conway was keeping well away from Harry so that he couldn't do it. On the sixth day Sarah was startled by an impatient hammering on the door of her apartment, and the sound of excited voices outside. She recognized the unashamed brogue of her landlady, Mrs. Peabody, but it was several moments before she identified the man's voice as that of Kieron Conway. What does *he* want she wondered, opening the door. Conway, dressed in velvet cape and broad-brimmed hat, a ruffled shirt and gray cutaway of startling elegance, stood outside. Mrs. Peabody, a small woman with graying hair pulled back in a bun so severe that it gave her eyes an Oriental cast, kept tugging ineffectually at Conway's sleeve.

"Madam," Conway said, his voice petulant, his temper barely in check, "kindly refrain from further pawing at the sleeve of my jacket, or I shall be obliged to render you senseless!"

It was so ludicrous, so ridiculous, that Sarah burst out laughing. The look on Conway's face, the astonished expression on Mrs. Peabody's, the very *idea* of him knocking her down, were all too much. Sarah laughed and laughed, rocking hysterically, holding her sides with tight-folded arms. Conway glared at her, and then at the landlady.

"Is everyone mad in this house?" he shouted. "Is there no sanity anywhere?"

"Oh," Sarah said, "oh, please, no, stop, please!"

"Miss Hutchinson!" Conway snapped. "Kindly inform this . . . this *harpy* that I am not some mendicant or, worse, a *tradesman*!" He said the word with infinite loathing.

"Harpy, is it?" snapped Mrs. Peabody. "I'll harpy you, you fancy-faced flimper! It's the law I'll be havin' on yez, so it is!"

Controlling her laughter with difficulty, Sarah managed to gasp out the fact that Conway was a producer, an important friend of Mr. Ford's, and—all things considered—quite respectable. She giggled furiously when Conway reacted as she had expected he would to the phrase "all things considered." She managed to get her face straight again as Mrs. Peabody looked Conway up and down, folded her arms across her ample bosom, and set her expression in the mould of someone who could argue the toss about *that* one all day, if need be.

"Well," she said, giving Conway an ice-cold glare. "Well!"

"Madam," Kieron said. "Mrs. Peabody. I have some private business to discuss with Sar—with Miss Hutchinson."

"Hmph," said Mrs. Peabody, still smarting at having been referred to as a harpy.

Once again Sarah had to work hard to control her giggles. She saw the ire rising in Kieron Conway like mercury in a thermometer.

"Why don't you—" he began.

"Just give us five minutes, Mrs. Peabody?" Sarah cut in before he could finish the sentence.

"Well," Mrs. Peabody said again. She looked Kieron Conway up and down, to see if he was fit to be allowed in so hallowed a place. Kieron looked at Sarah and when their eyes met both of them smiled without smiling. He understood and his whole demeanor changed. Like a chameleon, she thought. The smile he put on would have melted the heart of Boadicea, and Mrs. Peabody was no match for it. Honey dripped from Kieron Conway's voice as he laid a gentle hand on the forbidding forearm of the landlady. She looked at him as if he had a halo.

"My dear lady," Kieron said, gently taking hold of Mrs. Peabody's elbow and leading her ineluctably towards the door. "I knew the moment that I saw you that you had in you an infinite capacity for kindness. Was it not the great Greek poet Sophocles who said 'One who knows how to show and how to accept kindness will be a better friend than any possession'."

"Yiss," said the bedazzled Mrs. Peabody. "It surely was."

"Kind hearts, dear lady, are more than coronets," Kieron Conway chanted, closing the door behind her, "and simple faith than noble blood."

"Oh, er," Mrs. Peabody said, as Conway kissed the top of her head and firmly closed the door. He turned to face Sarah with eyes that shone with the triumph of a small boy who has played a successful practical joke on his father.

"Daft old biddy," he said.

Without warning, Sarah felt the sudden tug of attraction. Damn the man, she thought.

"Well, sir," she said. "Did he?"

"Did who what?"

"Did Sophocles say all that?"

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," he said, unabashed. Then his face grew serious, and he reached for Sarah's hand.

"Miss Hutchinson," he said. "Sarah. My dear girl. I have come here to make you famous!"

"What?" Sarah said. "You have what?"

"I want you to play the lead in my play," Kieron said. "For the rest of the run here in Baltimore. For as long as you wish in New York, anywhere the Conway Players appear. I want you to be my principal actress, my leading lady, our star. What do you say, Sarah?"

"I—I—" It was too much. Sarah could not manage the thoughts that were spinning around in her head. Could this be happening? She was carried away, but only for a moment.

"What about Mrs. Landsborough?" she said.

"She is leaving us," Kieron said. "Precipitantly."

"I thought you and she were friends?"

"My dear Sarah!" Conway said, feigning shock. "I am distressed to discover that you listen to backstage prattle, saddened to perceive that you believe it."

"I didn't say that," Sarah said.

"No matter," Kieron said, with a wave to indicate that he could somehow bear this great hurt.

"You say Mrs. Landsborough is leaving? Voluntarily?"

"I do, and she is."

"I don't think you're telling me the truth, Mr. Conway," she said.

"Sarah, you must be trying to break my heart! First you call me a cad and a mountebank and slap my face in public. Now you brand me a liar! Is this how I appear to you? Dissembler, deceiver, hypocrite, sham? Am I mendacious and equivocal? Disingenuous and inexact? Is that how you see me?"

"Frankly," Sarah said, "yes."

Kieron Conway looked at her, counterfeit shock all over his face. Then he grinned and Sarah grinned as unrepentantly as he, and in a moment, Conway threw back his handsome head and roared with laughter so infectious that it was impossible for Sarah not to join in.

"I like you, Hutchinson," Kieron said, still laughing. "You can see through me, can't you?"

"Yes, I can," Sarah said. "Now, before Mrs. P. comes back, tell me why you're here?"

"I'm wounded," Conway said, unconvincingly. "What I said before was perfectly true. I want you to take the lead in the play. In the company."

"I see. And the rest?"

"Well," he said, "there is one small thing."

"Ah," Sarah said.

"Ah, indeed. Mrs. Landsborough is not leaving in the future. She has left in the past. She has gone, vanished, disappeared. Pffftttt!"

"Where on earth has she gone?"

"I neither know nor care," Conway said, and there was an edge to his voice that indicated he meant it. "She has perhaps fled with some pot-bellied merchant, or eloped on the arm of some countrified swain with straw in his hair—who knows? Who gives a damn? I feel only pity for the poor fellow who awakens one morning to find that on the pillow next to him. Meanwhile"—more briskly now, as if shaking off bad memories—"I need a leading lady. You, my dear Sarah, are she."

"Why me?" Sarah asked. "You could have your pick."

"You intrigue me, Hutchinson," he said. "You interest me. I watched you at rehearsal. You have something, a different style. I don't know what it is, and I doubt that you do either. But I think you could be a fine actress, perhaps even a great one."

"You think so?" Sarah said. "You really think so?"

She could not help it: all of her swelled outward, like a bud bursting towards light. What he was saying was sincerely said, she was sure. He would not praise cheaply, or use sophistry as a weapon for his own ends, she thought. She did not know him then.

"All you need," Conway said, "is someone to assist you, someone with judgement and experience to teach and lead you. Someone to show you what you are doing right, so that you can do it whenever you wish to."

"Meaning you?"

"Meaning me," Kieron Conway said.

There is always that moment with men and women, a moment when their eyes meet and the promise is made without one single word being spoken, even being needed. Sometimes it is a challenge, sometimes a surrender, and sometimes a plea, but it is always in the same moment, the moment when both man and woman say yes, yes we will. Their hands might have met in just a moment more,

but before it could happen Mrs. Peabody banged on the door.

"Five minutes is up," she said. Kieron Conway pulled a horrifying face at the invisible dragon on the other side of the door, and then grinned at Sarah.

"Your Charon is both punctual and fierce," he said, bending low and kissing her hand. "I think that's my cue to exit."

"Indeed it is," she said, as the door swung open and Mrs. Peabody bustled in. Her posture was that of a house-proud chicken.

"Well, young man?" she said to Kieron, as though demanding an explanation. Her face was stern, but there was a hint of a twinkle in her eyes that could not hide itself. Kieron kissed her hand and she blushed like a fourteen-year-old.

"My dear Mrs. Peabody," he said, waltzing around her, twirling her as he did so. "My dear lady! My cup is full, nay, overflowing with happiness! I am so delirious, so overjoyed! It is all I can do to refrain from singing!"

"Oh, well, and sure that's hivvinly, altogether, that's what it is," Mrs. Peabody shrieked delightedly, as Kieron waltzed her around the room. "Oh, there's the joy of it!"

"Yes, indeed," Kieron said, releasing her as they came close to the door. He bowed gravely, and Mrs. Peabody clasped her hand in front of her bosom as if in prayer.

"Let me see you to the door," Sarah said, picking up her cue.

"How kind you are," Conway said, just sardonically enough for Sarah to wish she could kick him.

He bowed out backwards, making a production out of it, and grinning up at Sarah where Mrs. Peabody could not see his grimaces.

"At rehearsal, then?" he said.

"I'll be there," Sarah said. They looked at each other and again there were promises in their eyes. This is unbelievable, Sarah thought, this can't be happening to me. Kieron Conway turned to go. As he did so she whispered one last question. He opened the door beneath Mrs. Peabody's idiotically benevolent smile.

"Tell me," she muttered, so that the landlady could not hear. "Do you always talk like that?"

"Hell, no," Kieron Conway said with his schoolboy's grin. Then he was gone, and that night Sarah Hutchinson slept not at all.

Sarah had her own natural gift for the cadences of speech and the melodies of poetry to begin with. She learned, encouraged and directed by Kieron Conway, to project her own personality so that it glowed through the smoky haze of the footlights with an honesty and cleanliness that had a direct and instant appeal to every member of the audience. She sensed, rather than learned, that with her underplaying to Kieron's over-acting the contrast between their styles heightened both. They rehearsed intently together, sitting close, facing one another, each reading the other's eyes, anticipating the other's movements.

"No, no, no, *no!*" Kieron would shout. "You're fluttering your eyelids like a lovesick cow! Give me fire, damn it, passion! Act with your belly, not your brain!"

"Bully!" she would shout at him. "How could this woman love you? You are loud and you boast and you strut. This is a sensitive and intelligent woman. You won't win her by bullying!" They were talking, of course, about characters in a play, but the roles they played and their own lives were inextricably linked. They were talking about themselves, too, striking sparks from each other which were visible onstage. Audiences sensed the emotion and tension, and loved them for it. Affection rolled towards them from the auditorium like an incoming tide. At the end of each performance they would totter off, wringing wet from their exertions, fulfilled completely by the wild applause. They would collapse in the padded armchairs in their dressing-rooms, the chairs that they took everywhere with them, and the dresser would open the white wine which had been chilling in the ice-bucket. The cast would come in; there would be laughter and gossip and jokes. They would go out to dinner, sometimes alone together, other times with a crowd. Days sped into weeks and weeks into months. Sarah was caught up in and enchanted by a world where delight was normal,

success was ordinary, ovations were standard. She could not believe what was happening, and yet she knew it was true. Audiences loved her, her notices were excellent, her performances constantly improving. She was going to be a star; it was a heady thought.

Kieron recognized her star quality as readily as he had perceived the facets of her personality to which audiences would respond. He capitalized on them by writing plays around heroines with just such characteristics as Sarah's. The plays were popular—Kieron's plays invariably were. The Conway Players were well-known, what the profession called "a good draw." Managements liked them, and especially liked having Kieron Conway and Sarah Hutchinson co-starring on their boards. The gossip about them sold tickets. Were they lovers, or were they not?

Their relationship was a mystery even to their fellow players. In the hothouse of emotions that flourished at the back of every stage, people fell in and out of love at a prodigious rate. Affairs blossomed and died, people quarrelled and made up, were lifelong friends one day and mortal enemies the next. In a world where almost everyone was playing a part, where the standard greeting was an endearment, it was sometimes impossible to distinguish real emotion from counterfeit. Were they lovers or were they not?

In the summer of 1859 Jim Wallack invited Kieron to take the Conway Players to New York. Kieron was delighted, and set to work immediately on a new play with which to take the metropolis by storm. He chose a brave theme for the times, a sympathetic story about an outcast girl with negro blood. It was called *The Quadroon*, and Sarah was to play the part of the pregnant girl whose lover abandons her when he learns her terrible secret. When she finally read the script, Sarah was astonished, surprised and deeply moved. It was not just one of Kieron's "rough and tumble things" this time.

This time the heroine had as much fire and heart as any swaggering hero—more. There was more than cool honesty and sensitive cleanness here. Kieron had called her Sarah, and this Sarah was passionate and sensual and she moved men's emotions with her body, not her mind.

It made her go hot and cold to read the dialogue. It was a magnificent part, a dominating one. Everyone else in the play was pale and ordinary alongside it.

"It's a wonderful part, Kieron," she said softly. "A fine play. I'm proud of you."

"You like it?"

"Like it? I think it is magnificent," she said.

"I wrote it for you, Sarah," he said. "I woke up one morning and realized that the parts you have played up to now were just that, parts. Parts of you, but not the most important part. It was so easy to see the wit and the intelligence that I forgot about the passion."

"I—" Sarah did not know what to say. It was unnerving and yet somehow deeply comforting to realize that someone knew that much about her. She was somehow surprised that he had perceived it.

"It's time, Sarah," he said. "It's time now."

He reached across and touched her hair, his hands as gentle as a butterfly landing on a flower. The room was cool, twilit. The sounds of the street seemed muted. She was conscious of the pounding of her heart as he gently, gently, gently traced the contours of her face, her neck, her jaw. His kiss was soft and his lips were cool. Oh yes, Sarah thought, it is time, it's time now. Her own hand softly caressed the back of his head. There had been so many, many times when she had wanted to touch him and could not, because to touch that way meant only one thing, and she would not give the prying world that for a plaything. After a long, an endless, moment Kieron drew away from her and shook his head, as if bewildered by something.

"I had it all planned," he said, mock exasperation in his voice. "It was all organized. There was to be nothing like this, Sarah. No love, no marriage. The world is full of women. You're just a woman like all the rest of them."

"If that is so," she said, nestling closer to him, "why do you want me?"

"I don't know, Sarah," he said. "I'm damned if I do."

"Do you think perhaps it could be something as trite as love?"

"I think perhaps it could," he said, kissing her again.

She smiled, and he frowned, mock-angry. "Damn you!"

"Is it so hard to admit?"

"No," he said. "It's just . . . unexpected. You were there all the time. I can't help but wonder why it has taken so long."

"Because it is time for it to happen now," she said softly. "And that is all we need to know."

"And tomorrow?" he said, as he took her into his arms again, kissing her ready lips, her cheeks, her eyes. "What about tomorrow?"

Far away in the darkest corners of her memory Sarah heard the harsh clanging of the bell of the *Pacific*. "Tomorrow never comes," said a ghostly voice in an empty room. She shook her head, surrendering to him with the motion.

"We'll think about tomorrow . . . tomorrow," she said, and drew him to her in the darkness.

The Quadroon was an enormous hit, and Sarah's playing of the leading role had the theatrical critics tossing their hats into the air. The play made her a star of the first magnitude and Kieron the hottest playwright on Broadway. He wasted no time, following their success with another "novelty"—as topically slanted plays were then called—entitled *Busted! by Godfrey!* It was set in the Pike's Peak area, where there had been a gold rush a year or two earlier. In it, Kieron played the part of a miner, George Kirby, whose fortune is dissipated by a wicked adventuress (Sarah) who fastens on to him. It was another complete change of style for Sarah, and she revelled in the flamboyant clothes and inflamed lines which Kieron had given her. Audiences cheered when she was foiled, hissed when she succeeded, and gave her an ovation when the play concluded. Once again there were glittering notices in the trade paper, *Dramatic Mirror*.

In 1860 the Conway Players performed *Macbeth* at the old Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. It was an eerie, awesome feeling to be treading the same boards upon which, forty years earlier, Edwin Forrest had made his début. Kieron played the ill-fated king, and Sarah his wife, and both of them gave the performances of their lives. Critics hailed them as the definitive, the most striking interpretations of the parts for a decade. They noted particularly how, in the sleepwalking scene, Sarah had underplayed the role where for years the style had been

to do it with all the stops full out. They remarked how effective the change was, how introspection made the character much more understandable than before. Sarah smiled, and told the reporters that she had taken her cue from Mrs. Siddons.

"How is that, ma'am?" one asked.

"You'll recall that in Campbell's *Life*, Mrs. Siddons remarked that Macbeth was always pouring out his woes to his wife?" Sarah said. "Mrs. Siddons believed that in doing so Macbeth eased his heart, unloaded its weight of woe. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, endures in silence. She has no one to whom she may turn. Overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes, her frail frame and feelings sink beneath the weight."

"And you, Mr. Conway?" they asked. "What do you read to get into the part of Macbeth?"

"Me, boys?" Kieron grinned. "Why, I read the *Police Gazette* like the rest of you!"

Always good copy, that was Kieron Conway. He was a crowd-pleaser and no mistake. The newspapermen dashed away to file their copy. It sold tickets, as Kieron shamelessly observed.

Later that year they took Tom Taylor's play *Our American Cousin* on tour, starting in Baltimore and moving on to Washington and Philadelphia before bringing it triumphantly into New York. Too clever by far to attempt out-acting Joe Jefferson, who had made the part of the American cousin his own two years earlier, Kieron essayed the role of Lord Dundreary. By the time they got to Ford's Theater in Washington Kieron had perfected his comic pastiche of that most English of Englishmen, the chinless wonder. He played a fop of such enormous proportions that his every syllable almost brought down the house.

"Damn you, damn you, damn you, Kieron Conway!" Sarah raged backstage after the first night in Washington. "You've taken over the play. The rest of us are standing around like props, waiting to see what you'll do next!"

"You heard the audience, Sarah," he said grandly. "Don't tell me they didn't like it."

"They loved it, you bonehead!" she shouted. "They

loved every addleheaded thing you did. They would have applauded if you had tripped over your shoelace! But what about the rest of the company? Are we to merely stand about while you have your romp? Is that your idea of ensemble playing?"

"Sarah, Sarah," he said, his voice all sweet reason. "I'm just having a little fun. Kicking over the traces a little."

"And us? May we do likewise?"

"You, my dear, may do any damned thing you please!" he snapped. "Except—if you will be so sweetly kind—to instruct me in acting!"

"You need no instruction in that department," Sarah said, as wickedly saccharin as he. "It's manners you lack, you smoke-cured Virginia ham!" And she hurled her hairbrush at his head. Kieron ducked, and the tortoiseshell-backed brush clipped a chunk of wood out of the dressing-room door-frame.

"Temper, temper!" Kieron grinned, anger dissolving into mischief. "You'll break something!"

"It'll be your damned neck!" Sarah said, launching herself at him. He caught her clawed hands, and held her in a grip she could not break. Then he kissed her. She wrenched her lips away from his, and struggled harder to break his grip, but now he just smiled his shark's smile and kissed her again, and then again, passion in it now. Hating him and loathing him, she felt the hatred and the loathing swimming away in the warm upward movement of her blood. The soft misty pink tide swelled from her heart, swamping her brain, softening the muscles of her neck and her back. Hating herself for being a woman and yet knowing she wanted to be a woman for this man more than anything else, Sarah surrendered.

"Oh Kieron," she sighed, as his hands softly slid beneath her dressing-gown. "Will you never alter?"

"Not if I can help it," he said, blowing out the lamp.

At the beginning of 1861 Kieron revived *The Quadroon* in New York, adding effects which made the play an even bigger success than before. Producers clamored to see what Kieron would write next. It was, in fact, as "small"

as *The Quadroon* had been "big," a lighthearted thing with an Irish theme that took everyone by surprise and the theater-going public by storm. *Eileen-O*, it was called, and it became the most successful play in town. The Winter Garden was besieged by lines of people wanting tickets at any price, in any part of the theater. You were nobody if you hadn't seen the play.

Eileen-O was the hit of the season, and Kieron and Sarah once more the darlings of New York. The upper classes came to pay them court and take them to their bejewelled bosoms after Isaac Brown, sexton of Grace Church and acknowledged guardian of the social citadel, pronounced the play "morally uplifting and thoroughly delightful." His suggestions as to the enlargement of their acquaintanceships were not far short of law among fashionable Manhattanites, and soon Kieron and Sarah found themselves invited to balls and soirées at the homes of the Gracies and the Rhinelanders, at the Lafayette Place mansion of the Schemerhorns, or in the Gothic monstrosities built by merchant princes and shipping kings along the upper stretches of Fifth Avenue.

The talk was always of the impending war. Everyone knew by then that it had to come; it was merely a matter of when. Many, in fact, advocated it strongly, and not a few said it would be "good for business." The presidential campaign currently in progress was a bitterly divisive one. No one was sure that the Union would survive. Sarah could scarcely conceal how appalled she felt to hear men discussing dollars and cents of profits at times like those, and gradually she began to decline their invitations. In this Kieron not only supported her but encouraged her. He hated the gilded palaces of Upper Tendom and made no bones about it.

"These stuffed-shirt parties bore me silly, Sarah," he said one day. "They are full of fat old ladies who patronize me and fat old men who nudge and wink and want to hear naughty stories about what goes on backstage, eh, what, dontcherknow?"

And he huffed and winked like any one of the dozen old goats she had herself met and had to fend off. They laughed, as they always laughed together, but behind his

laughter Sarah detected an unease, a restlessness. She could not identify its cause but she saw its effect.

By day he would pursue his favorite pastime, riding on the prow of one of the hundreds of omnibuses which plied up and down traffic-jammed Broadway. "Yellow Birds," "Red Birds" and "Broadway Originals," they were called, garish as their names, painted like harlots, and piloted by tough young fellows and nicknames usually too risqué for polite usage. They told enormously tall tales which made Kieron throw back his handsome head and roar with laughter as the omnibus careened down the crowded avenue.

Sometimes, after a performance, Kieron went to the fights at Harry Hill's drum on Houston Street, or gambled with the wideawakes at Johnny Morrissey's sumptuous casino opposite the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Most nights, however, he was at the De Soto on Bleeker Street, talking shop. The De Soto was a renowned theatrical watering hole, famous for its broiled kidneys and rarebits. Ed Booth spent every evening there when he was in town; Joe Jefferson, too. It was like a club; the talk was always lively, the mood always gay. Kieron had been going there since his early days in New York, and he enjoyed his celebrity the more now for his memories of obscurity then. Sometimes he or the other actors would perform impromptu for their fellows; often the festivities went on until dawn. There were plenty of young women there for those who looked for them. Plenty of young men, too, for such as wanted that. But Kieron, however wild and irresponsible in drink, was never unfaithful. Sarah was as sure of that as she was sure of her own name. Kieron was a fine actor, but he was the most terrible liar she had ever met. He could no more tell a lie than a cat can hide its tail.

They might have stayed in New York for ever had it not been for the war, but once the guns boomed at Fort Sumter and President Lincoln began calling for militia-men everyone knew that it was no longer a political argument. By the time the news of the terrible battle at Manassas arrived in July, war became an inescapable fact of daily life.

"Do you know what it means to us, to the profession?" Kieron said one night.

"The same as it means to everyone else," Sarah said sadly, "misery and bloodshed."

She had sat up all night with Clara Prentiss. Clara was the company's stage manager, costume designer and Jill-of-all-trades. She was twenty-eight and as plain as muslin. Her husband Stephen, the company juvenile, had been among the first to respond to Mr. Lincoln's call for volunteers. Now Stephen Prentiss lay dead in the mud alongside the Warrenton Turnpike. Sarah had tried to help Clara Prentiss find Manassas on the map in an atlas, but it was not marked. That fact, more than any other, had rendered Clara inconsolable. She could accept Stephen's death, she sobbed. But that it should happen in a place of so little importance that no one even thought it worth putting on a map was more than she could endure. She wept and wept and wept until there was no more weeping in her, and then she had slept like a dead woman. The next day she was as dry-eyed and efficient as always, only the dark, dark circles beneath her eyes evidence of her pain. She did not speak of her husband's death and Sarah did not tell Kieron about the hours she had spent with Clara. He had been out most of the night anyway, at the De Soto, and had slept late the next day, as was his wont.

"Everybody's agreed it'll be a long, hard war," he said to Sarah. "A year, perhaps even longer than that. There'll be no easy victory over the Confederacy, and that means hardship for us all. Half of our audience—all the big Southern cities—are closed off. Half of our repertoire, too."

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Feelings are running too high for us to be able to perform a play like *The Quadroon* any more. If we were to do that one in some places in the South we'd be tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail!"

"But we can't just play comedy and Shakespeare!"

"I know," Kieron said, "and I have an idea."

Suppose they went on a tour of the United States?

Kieron said. Suppose they became strolling players, like the old Shakespearian troupes, playing in every town they came to, taking live theater out to places that had never seen such a thing?

"But—you just said yourself that we cannot play the South," Sarah said. "Where would we go?"

"West!" Kieron said, with a dramatic sweep of his arm. "To the new Territories, Sarah! To Oregon and Washington, Montana. Anywhere there is an audience. Let others sit here on their hands. We'll go out west and create a whole new theatrical tradition! We'll take the entire company! I'll write a brand new play! Imagine the word of mouth that will build up ahead of us as we travel! Each little hamlet will turn out with a brass band to meet us! We'll cross the country like royalty, Sarah! Can't you just see it?"

As always, Sarah was swept up in his enthusiasm, fired by his idea. No one had ever done it, no one even knew if it could be done. Everyone agreed that if it could Kieron Conway was the man who could do it. He had come up with a brilliant idea, a dramatic adaptation of Dumas' novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. With Kieron as Edmond Dantes and Sarah as his faithless sweetheart, they were an instant, an enormous, success when they opened the play in New York in that November of 1861. The special effects drew gasps of admiration from the audience, and yet they were achieved with sets which could be struck in an hour. Kieron had meant every word that he had said about taking the entire company west. To Sarah's surprise only one or two of the younger actors dropped out. To her even greater surprise Kieron asked her a question one evening over dinner that for a moment left her speechless.

"Do you love me, Sarah?" he asked.

"Do you doubt it?" she said, when she regained her poise.

"And do I love you?"

"Most of the time," she said with a smile.

"I'm not much of a bargain," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Past my best," he said. "Thirty-four. Wrinkles, see?"

He pushed his face nearer so that she could see his wrinkles, and she laughed at him and kissed him.

"I like you with wrinkles," she said. "You look more distinguished."

"Hair's going gray, too," he said, mock-mournful. "It's all downhill from here."

"Fool," she said. "Do you think I love you for the color of your hair?"

"I don't know why you love me," he said. "Do you?"

She was silent for a moment, considering the question. It was a long time since she had thought about it. She wanted to answer him as honestly as she could.

"It never occurs to me to do anything else," she said, and he smiled and threw his arms around her extravagantly and gave her a deliberately smacky-wet kiss on the tip of her nose.

"Right then, me pretty," he said, twirling imaginary moustaches. "I'll ask you the once, and never again. Will yer be mine?"

"I am yours, Kieron," she said. "Body and soul."

"Darling Sarah," he said softly, all pretence fled. "I want to marry you."

She searched his eyes for mischief and saw none, watched the corner of his mouth for suppressed laughter. None appeared.

"You mean it?" she said, breathless in a strange, unbreathless way.

"I said I'd only ask you the once, my pretty," he said, but the mock leer was loving, not teasing. "What's it to be?"

"Why?" she said. "Why do you want to marry me now?"

"It never occurs to me to do anything else," he said, and she went into his arms with tears spilling unbidden from her eyes, every fear that she had ever entertained in her whole life gone in that lovely moment.

They were married the following Wednesday by a justice of the peace in Boston, and spent their honeymoon frantically preparing for the opening of *Monte Cristo* at the Federal Theater on Washington Street. Kieron was a

veritable dynamo of decisions, arranging transportation and schedules, haranguing the entire company from hotel to theater to station like a combination of sheepdog and God.

The glamour had worn off very quickly for Kieron. Arranging everything that first time had been exciting, and fun. Having to do it time after time after time soon turned into drudgery and he wanted none of it.

"Don't nag at me all the time, dammit!" he stormed at Sarah when she asked him what arrangements he had made for their next journey, their next stop. "It's bad enough having to run this blasted company without you breathing down my neck all the time with stupid questions!"

"If someone doesn't breathe down your neck nothing gets done at all!" she snapped back.

"Well, damn my eyes, I'd like to see you do better!" Kieron said.

"I'd be hard put to do worse!" Sarah replied. They glared at each other like two duellists for a long, long moment. Then Sarah sighed.

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry," she said, laying a hand on his forearm. "It's just that—"

"Don't sorry me, *darling!*" Kieron snapped, pulling his arm away. "I'm sick and tired of it!"

"Kieron, please—" she said. Sarah was distressed. She had seen him like this with other people many times, but Kieron had never been this way with her, never. "Please don't be angry."

"You don't want me to be angry?" he said. "You want to tell me I'm a stupid fool, you want to tell me I don't do everything that needs doing, you want to tell me you could do it ten times better than me—but you don't want me to be angry when you do. Well, my dear, you can go straight to hell in a bucket! I, for one, am going out to get drunk!"

So saying, he snatched up his cloak and stormed out of the theater. When he came back in the early hours, rolling drunk, they argued again. He swore as God was his witness that he was never going to do a single damned thing for anyone as long as he damnedwell lived. She

thought it was the whiskey talking, but it was not. He awakened the following day as determined as he had gone to sleep the night before.

"You want the halfpennies, you also get the kicks," he said to Sarah. "I wash my hands of the whole thing. From now on, you run the company, and I wish you joy of the whole blasted mess!"

There was no option, and so Sarah stepped into the breach. She was quite confident that once he got over his tantrum, Kieron would take over the financial and travelling arrangements again. But he never did. He slept till noon each day, rising to saunter around whatever town they were in and "take a smile" with "the boys," playing cards in the saloons until ninety minutes before curtain time, when he would return to the theater. After the performance he would disappear again, often not returning to wherever they were lodging until the small hours of the morning.

All right, then, Sarah told herself. If that's how it has to be, then there's no alternative. If I have to do it I might as well do it as well as I can. So she set herself a whole new series of disciplines to learn: train schedules and double-entry bookkeeping, performance fees and salary books, hotel accommodations and menu planning. Her days became very full, and very long. After a while she found that she did not mind at all. Since Kieron was missing, there was nothing else to fill her life. Once or twice men made overtures, but she ignored them. Sometimes she was wretchedly lonely but in time she learned to live with that, too.

The memories flicked through Sarah's mind—impressions, feelings, emotions passing like shadows, images parading through her mind like the pages of a photograph album. The new Secretary for War, Mr. Stanton, had gone backstage to congratulate them after the Boston opening. He was a big man with Dundreary whiskers, and he smelled of bay rum and whisky. They closed on April 6, 1862, as news began to come in of a big battle in Tennessee at a place called Shiloh. The Federal Army had lost more than thirteen thousand men, the newspapers said, the Confederates over ten thousand. They were

calling it the greatest battle ever fought upon the American continent, as though that were something to be proud of. How did they know how many men had died? Sarah wondered. Did someone go out on to the battlefield and count them?

They moved on to Albany, and from there to Scranton, Pennsylvania. The play was in its second week there when Lee collided with McClellan at Antietam, and as many men were killed in one day there as had been killed in the entire battle of Shiloh. Leaves were already drifting down from the trees; news of such awful slaughter seemed unbelievable in the peaceful Pennsylvania countryside. How could so many men be killed in so short a time?

They spent Christmas in a boarding house in Pittsburgh, and the New Year in Cleveland, Ohio. Kieron read Sarah a piece from the *Gazette and Commercial Register* about Mr. Lincoln's proclamation of emancipation for all slaves in those states then in rebellion against the Union.

They travelled back east to Philadelphia, where they played the old Arch Street Theater, owned and operated by that most formidable of all theatrical matriarchs, Louisa Lane Drew.

"Old tyrant," Kieron muttered as she sailed in to be presented to the company. "Don't let her scare you."

Mrs. Drew was a well-made, mature woman—no one would ever have called her pretty, although Sarah imagined that as a young woman Louisa Lane would certainly have been called handsome. She had heavy eyebrows and a pugnacious jaw, and her hair was as gray as a badger's.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen," she said. "I trust you are all aware that we have certain rules here at the Arch Street Theater?" She pronounced it "theahta."

"Indeed we do, Mrs. Drew," Sarah said sweetly. "And we have our own as well. The two combined should more than ensure a happy sojourn for all of us."

"Well, well," Mrs. Drew said. "You'll be Sarah Hutchinson, I'll be bound."

"Sarah Hutchinson Conway, and at your service, ma'am," Sarah said, with a little curtsy. Kieron made a face at her behind Mrs. Drew's back and she almost

laughed out loud. Kieron didn't like what he called kowtowing. Sarah knew there were times when it was politic, so she did it for both of them.

"Hm," Mrs. Drew said, tapping her out-thrust chin with the fan she always carried. "I think I'm going to like you, child. Come to dinner tonight, seven sharp. Bring him, too, if you've got to."

She did not actually jerk her head at Kieron, nor yet make any movement with her hands. Just the eyes; but that was all she needed.

"You mean my husband, Mrs. Drew?" Sarah said, making her work for it. Mrs. Drew looked at Sarah and frowned, but there was a smile behind it. "If that rascal Kieron Conway is your husband, then it's him I mean," she snapped. "Is he?"

"He is," Sarah smiled.

"Doubtless you'll rue it," Mrs. Drew said.

Sarah discovered that the old lady's bite was worse than her bark, just as Kieron had warned her, but she was determined to like her. Once Mrs. Drew realized it and began to relax, she became a fascinating raconteuse. She had made her American *début* on September 6, 1827 at the Walnut Street Theater.

"Just a few blocks away," she told them, her eyes full of the past. "I was Duke of York to Junius Brutus Booth's Richard the Third. The audience gave us an ovation, every performance. I couldn't believe it, no one could, not my parents, not anyone. Certainly not me. They sent me to Joe Cowell's Theater in Baltimore to play Albert to Forrest's William Tell."

"Did you like him best of all the leading men with whom you appeared?"

"Forrest? No, he was too grand a fellow by far for me. Two hundred dollars a night they paid him, and that's thirty years ago, when a dollar was worth something. No, girl, the one I always preferred was Tyrone Power. Tyrone Power. . . ." Her voice trailed away as she relived some long-passed event, some treasured memory. "He died, you know. He was on the *President*. He sailed for New York on March the twenty-first, eighteen forty-one. The ship was never heard of again."

"I heard he was as good a comedian as ever graced the boards," Kieron said.

"Oh, he was," Mrs. Drew said. "Like you, Conway, all blarney and brogue. The kind that takes a girl's heart and makes mincemeat of it. Hear me, now, Sarah Conway. Don't let this one cut your heart into pieces. He will if you give him half the chance. Black Irish to the bone, like Paddy Power was!"

They talked on late into the evening, as the candles guttered in the heavy silver candelabra and soft-footed servants removed the dishes. Louisa Lane told them of the death of Lafayette in 1834; she had listened to the tolling of the Liberty Bell that mourned the great man's passing. A year later she had heard its last cracking clang as they sounded the requiem of Chief Justice John Marshall.

At Denver, Colorado, the Conway Players performed before a noisy crowd of shirt-sleeved miners in the Barney Brothers' Apollo Hall. The "theater" was a draughty room on the second floor of a rickety old wooden building on Larimer Street, and a considerable comedown from the elegantly gracious facilities of Louisa Lane Drew's Philadelphia theater. It was luxury incarnate compared to their next stop at nearby Georgia Gulch. In the mud-thick street full of shanty buildings their theater, grandiosely named Mountaineer Hall, turned out to be two shelves gouged out of the mountainside, one of which was used as a stage, the other for an auditorium. Along one side of the latter ran a long pine bar where, throughout the performance, three bartenders dispensed drinks; liquor for five cents a shot, beer two bits a schooner. The "dressing-rooms" consisted of a portion of the stage screened from the audience by tarpaulins and bedsheets. The "box office" was the crate in which the company had shipped its piano.

St. Louis, Kansas City and Omaha—the Conway Players appeared in them all. At Omaha Kieron spent all his free time in Shoats' Billiard Saloon, which boasted twelve tables, a splendid bar, and "the best free lunch west of St. Louis."

The billiard ball was the hangout of the local *jeunesse dorée*, and Kieron took malicious pleasure in separating

them from their dollars. He was a born pool hustler. He told Sarah that they were calling Omaha "Bilksville" because so many suckers had been conned into investing in worthless land near the town in the pious hope that Omaha would become the eastern terminal of the proposed transcontinental railroad.

"There's fat chance of that," he said. "Fat chance of any railroad at all, if you ask me, even if Congress has passed the Railroad Act into law."

"They could certainly use some form of transportation out here," Sarah observed, reflecting on the long, dusty hours they had already spent in outmoded jerkies and heaving wagons, clanking "fliers" that merely crawled, and thunderous steamboats which were just as likely to go aground as go anywhere. "It can take one as long to go from Omaha to Chicago as it does to cross the entire country."

"What would these yokels want with a railroad?" Kieron asked rhetorically, not expecting an answer. "Who would want to come and see them?"

"Kieron," she remonstrated, "that's cruel."

"Yes," he said, with his shark grin, "it is, isn't it?"

From Omaha they travelled downstream to St. Joseph, and then again to Kansas City, playing short engagements in each town. They travelled in the packed carriages of the Northern Missouri's "Weston Cannonball" as far as the "city" of Weston, where they were ferried across the river to Leavenworth, a dollar a person. When Kieron asked for a party rate, the ferryman looked at the sky and then at Kieron and then spat into the river.

"Sonny," he said. "You ruther swim?"

Another train took them to St. Louis, where they played *Monte Cristo* to packed houses at the National Theater. Then on to Chicago at the invitation of Jim McVickers, who booked them for a month's run at his \$85,000 theater on Madison Street. McVickers told them that the Mormons had built a magnificent new theater in Salt Lake City, modelled directly on one in London, the Drury Lane. It took them five weeks to cross the plains, but they played *Othello* for the Mormons. Brigham Young, the Mormon leader, kept a private box at the theater for

his own personal use at all times. After a week of *Othello* they did *Monte Cristo* for a week, and then *Eileen-O*. Each was a roaring success. Old Brigham Young came down to the auditorium and set up a rocking chair in the center aisle, a huge bear of a man in dark clothes and heavy boots who sat and beamed paternally at the actors and actresses, sometimes with two or three of his grandchildren asleep in his lap.

In Virginia City, Montana—Alder Gulch, they called it—the miners gave them a standing ovation every night, showering the stage with gold coins and buckskin pokes of gold dust, and yelling Sarah's name over and over again. They stayed at the Missouri House, where board and lodging cost fourteen dollars per person a week. The food was abominable, the town a muddy morass, its one street lined with houses and stores no better than prairie dugouts, log-walled and roofed with dirt, mud and stones. At Virginia Gulch the street ended in a wilderness of shovelled earth and stone sometimes a quarter of a mile wide. It looked exactly as if some enormous hog had been rooting up the soil. Kieron allowed none of the women in the company on the street unescorted lest they be accosted as whores. "There are no decent women in this hellhole," he said. "Don't expect the miners to know any different."

Sarah almost argued with him, but held her peace; she knew her miners much better than he did. However, she stayed off the street for reasons not connected with his ban. Miners were a wandering breed. There was always the possibility, however remote, that some of the miners grubbing here in the earth in Montana were the same men who had scabbled for gold in California ten years earlier. Once they had the fever it never left them. Sarah preferred not to be recognized, although she doubted that anyone who had known her in California as Sarah Malone would recognize her now.

Next they travelled to Portland, Oregon, where Kieron bought the eastern newspapers at Franklin's Book Store on Front Street. For the first time they learned about the draft riots in New York, and the Union victory at Gettysburg. The toll had again been terrible: one out of every

four Union soldiers killed, one in three of the Confederate dead, wounded or missing. Sarah longed again for the isolation of the Montana mountains. She had loved the sweeping vistas of the empty land, the burning hills on the far horizon. They could have been living on the moon, so little news of the outside world did they hear. What news came arrived so late that it was like reading history books. All the discomforts, all the lack of privacy and sanitation, were as nothing to the peace she had experienced when she sat by the window of the hotel and watched the softening glow of the westering sun throw giant shadows across the serried surface of the purple plains.

How the years had flown! They had been playing Piper's Opera House in Virginia City—the one in Nevada, not the one in Montana—when the war ended. They returned to New York immediately. They had a fine offer from the biggest new theatrical force in the East, Augustin Daly; it would have been madness to refuse. Daly wanted them to co-star in his new play *Under The Gaslight*. They took a packet to Panama City, a train overland, and another boat to New York. How mundane, how commonplace, the journey had become! Nothing seemed to remain of the hardships and the spectacle and the feeling of adventure Sarah had experienced when first she crossed the isthmus.

Under The Gaslight was one of the biggest successes of the '67 season, and confirmed Sarah and Kieron Conway once more as the darlings of the Broadway stage. They rented a big house on fashionable West 17th Street, and Kieron flung himself headlong into a joyous round of "reunions," donning again the mantle of that "broth of a boy" he had always been, whose star had always glowed brightest, whose wit had always been the sharpest, whose capacity for drink had always been the greatest, and whose attraction for women had always been the strongest. They flocked around him now, for he was assured, travelled, and successful. He had a fund of stories more bizarre than anyone in the theatrical world, and he had more dinner invitations than he knew how to cope with. Kieron could no more resist his role than he could resist

the blandishments of the city. Sarah did not try to prevent him or dissuade him; she knew better. Kieron was her husband, but he was not her possession.

She made her own friends. Their neighbors on West 17th Street were the Bottas, who introduced Sarah to Alice and Phoebe Cary. The sisters lived in a low, wide, old-fashioned house on East 20th Street, near Fourth Avenue. On Sunday afternoons that stretched into evenings and often midnights their home was a haven of good talk, good food and intelligent company. Alice and Phoebe were originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, and had gone to New York lacking as Phoebe trenchantly phrased it, "the slightest pretension to social grace, and even less money." Determined to support themselves by writing, they starved genteelly until Alice's *Clovernook Stories* were accepted by a publisher and Phoebe's poetry began to receive attention. The sisters were drawn into the orbit of Rufus Griswold, editor of the *International Literary Monthly*, and were soon fully launched into literary society.

Alice, the elder of the two, was slender and delicate, with graying hair and an air of gentle melancholy. Phoebe, on the other hand, although past forty already, was plump, black-haired, energetic and always dressed in vivid colors. She attracted men: Kieron said that she radiated man-appeal the way a stove gives off heat. It wasn't anything to do with her looks, which were only so-so. It was energy, vitality and an unquenchable intelligence. She was interested in everyone and everything.

And the men she attracted! Big, hulking Phineas Barnum, George Ripley, John de Forest, whose novel *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* had latterly caused such a stir. John Willie—as Phoebe called him—had not only written a highly realistic picture of the late war but also given his principal character, Miss Larue, spirit and independence and no inhibitions about men. To see de Forest arguing the merits of literary realism with Edwin Booth, to hear Emerson and Bayard Taylor discussing Goethe, to sit on the stairs with Horace Greeley while he sipped his cup of sweetened milk and water prior to slipping away to write his Monday morning editorial—

all this was heady stuff for Sarah. For the first time she was among people who expected more of her than she beautiful and know her lines, not people whose only interest was their last part or their next, or everyone else's private affairs. At the Carys', people demanded that she *think*, and be honest about how she felt.

Greeley, particularly, interested himself in her. He was in his sixties, a tall, rather stout man with a moon face and white whiskers worn around his throat and under his chin. He had small, pale-blue eyes that peered out from behind large spectacles, and his baggy frock coat trousers and white waistcoat were always rumpled and inkstained.

"The more ideas set in circulation the better, Sarah," he told her sententiously in his creaky voice. "The more radical the ideas, the better, too."

"Even ideas as radical as those of the women's movement, Mr. Greeley?" she said, half-teasingly. He was a dear; he reminded her of a startled rabbit when he looked up suddenly like that, surprised by a remark.

"Women's movement, my dear?" He shook his head. "They've a long way to go, a long way. I've met Susan Anthony. D'you know her?"

"No, but would like to."

"She comes here once in a while, you're bound to meet her. And Stanton, too. Just don't swallow it all hook, line and sinker. Women will get suffrage, see if they don't. *The Tribune's* for it. I'm for it. It'll come. But not this year, oh, no! Not this year!" He wagged his head sagely and sipped from his cup of watered milk.

"I thought I might do some pieces on subjects of interest to women," he went on. "They're an exploited class, women. We need some new ideas on the subject. Yes, I might very well do something along those lines tomorrow. Yes."

She was already a shadow to him. His mind was turned inwards, thinking of what he would write in his morning editorial. Sarah slipped away, leaving him to his reverie.

"You're Sarah Conway, aren't you?"

Sarah turned to see a small girl with intense, green-brown eyes gazing at her with an expression which somehow managed to combine envy and admiration.

"I wanted to thank you," the girl said.

"Thank me?" Sarah said. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I mean for . . . well, so many things, things you have done in the theater," the girl said. She was tiny, not much more than five feet tall, with high cheekbones and a slender figure. Her fine, golden-brown hair was parted in the middle and drawn back into a chignon. Her clothes were very good. "For so many evenings of delight," she said.

"I—well, thank you," Sarah said. "And you are . . . ?"

"There's no reason you should know my name," the girl said. "Not yet, anyway. Although I hope one day it will be as famous as yours."

"You're an actress?"

"Yes," the girl said. "My name is Jenny Bruce. I'm with Wallack's company."

"Then you're in good hands," Sarah said. "Mr. Wallack is a fine actor and a fine man."

"I know it," Jenny Bruce said. She hesitated, as if there were much more that she would like to say but did not know how to begin saying it. She bobbed her head shyly and retreated as Phoebe Cary came across and took Sarah's hand.

"Sarah, come, there's someone I want you to meet," she said. "Who was that you were talking to?"

"An actress," Sarah said. "She told me her name was Bruce. Jenny Bruce. Do you know her?"

"Ah, that one," Phoebe smiled. "Very intense; our Miss Bruce. Takes life very seriously. She wants to be Susan Anthony's right-hand woman, to lift high the banner of women's rights. Lives with some numbskull shipping tycoon. A champagne revolutionary, my dear."

"Not like me, you mean," Sarah said, with a self-deprecating smile. "Who is it you wish me to meet?"

"Ah, yes, come. Sarah, this is Anna Leonowens. Ask her about Siam."

"Siam?" Sarah said, flabbergasted, watching Phoebe sail away into the other room. "I don't know the first thing about Siam. I'm not even sure I know where it is!"

"Very few people do," said Mrs. Leonowens. She was

a slender, pretty woman with an immediately identifiable British accent. It transpired that she was a widow who had spent some years at the royal court of Siam as governess and teacher of the young Prince Chulalongkorn. Acquiring great influence with his father the king, Mrs. Leonowens had succeeded in bringing about many reforms in that pagan land, especially in respect of the role there of women, who were little more than chattels. Sarah listened spellbound to Mrs. Leonowens's stories of Siam's cruelties and grandeurs, the mysticism of the Orientals. She was an unassuming and reticent woman, and one would have passed her in the street, Sarah thought, without ever guessing what she knew about the life of women in faraway places like Persia, India, and Siam. Compared to their lot, she told the growing group drawn closer by the quiet, lilting accent and the bizarre, almost incredible stories, American women were as free as Boadicea of the Iceni. Mrs. Anthony was right, she said, but Mrs. Anthony was not divine.

Susan Anthony went quite often to the Cary house, for she had persuaded Phoebe to serve as substitute editor for the newspaper of the women's movement, *The Revolution*. The "movement" was headed by Mrs. Anthony and her colleagues—there were murmurs that they were more than colleagues, but no one at the Cary house either heeded them or cared anyway—Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Sarah was awed by her for a while, as she was awed by many of the people with whom she was coming into contact those days. When she discovered that they admired her talents as much as she did theirs, all her inhibitions vanished.

With Sarah caught up in this whirl of new friends and new ideas, Kieron sulked. He did not care for the intelligentsia, and had no patience at all with the women's movement.

"I'm a male chauvinist, Sarah," he would say airily. "I still believe the old saying: 'A woman, a dog and a walnut tree—the more you beat them, the better they'll be'."

There were no arguments; he would simply find some way to depart before the conversations got going. An appointment with Daly, a producer's meeting uptown, a

first night he must attend, always something to take him away from her. He was devoting less and less time to acting and more and more to being an impresario. As always, Kieron dressed the part to the hilt: a heavy coat with a fur collar, a silk hat, a silver-topped cane. Other actors and actresses—even the famous ones—went out of their way to tip their hats or nod. They would stop their carriages for a chat, offer him luncheon or drinks, or invite him to some soirée or other, or a night on the tiles in the Tenderloin. Kieron produced an adaptation of Bret Harte's story *The Luck of Roaring Camp* and then one of Washington Irving's *Rip van Winkle*. The play made Joe Jefferson famous and Kieron Conway rich, really rich for the first time in a life that had never been beset by money problems. As if to prove that he did not do it for money he spent a month during the winter of 1868 writing a new dramatic version of *La Vie de Bohème*. He took it to Daly, who said that he would produce it with Kieron—if Kieron could persuade Sarah to play the part of Mimi. Daly, a man with an impeccably elegant finger on the public pulse, was sure that both she and the play were made for each other, and that it had all the markings of another enormous hit. Production was slated for the following spring, but by the time that spring came round Sarah Conway was pregnant.

Her first and only child was a daughter, whom she named Kathleen after her own mother and Edith after Kieron's. The child's godfather was Joseph Jefferson, her godmother Phoebe Cary. She was born on May 10, 1869, the very same day that the news was telegraphed across America that the golden spike had been driven in Utah, joining the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific into the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point. One week later to the day Sarah discovered that her husband was having an affair with Lesley Reynolds, the actress signed to replace her in the new play, *Mimi*.

"You don't seriously expect me to believe you give a damn, Sarah!" Kieron said. "After all, you've shown precious little interest in my fair white body this last year. More, if it comes to that. I'm not a saint, you know."

"Oh," Sarah said. "I know *that*, Kieron."

"Sarcasm, too!" he said. "I'm getting the complete arsenal tonight."

"Damn you!" Sarah said, her temper erupting. "Do you expect me to just sit here and take this? Do you think I relish having every member of the company knowing you're sleeping with that trollop?"

"Sarah," Kieron said, his voice going very quiet and his face pale. "I don't think you'd better say things like that about Lesley."

"I'll say that and I'd say more if there were words in the language to describe her kind!" Sarah snapped. "She's a—"

He slapped her. For several seconds afterwards, as her head sang with shock and surprise. Sarah felt no pain, nothing. The realization that he had hit her was stunning, awful. She could not bring herself to believe it.

"Why?" she whispered. "Why, Kieron, why?"

"Why did I slap you? To stop you saying something we would both regret, Sarah. I won't have you calling Lesley filthy names."

"She is what she is," Sarah said. "But I didn't mean that. I want to know why you need her at all. I cannot understand it, Kieron. Tell me! Make me understand what it is she can give you that I do not! I am your wife, the mother of your child, your friend, your partner. What else is there?"

"You want a simple answer," he said. "You always want it nice and simple. Life isn't that way, Sarah. It's complicated and cruel and—well, dammit, it's just not simple and that's all."

"It's not simple for me, either," she said. She knew now that she would have to try very hard not to cry. If she started to cry he would stalk away. He always did.

"I am trying to understand that," she said, slowly. "I am trying to understand so that I can cope with it, so that it won't ruin our lives. I think that if you . . . if she . . . if you need someone else, then perhaps half of the blame at least lies at my door. I want to try to . . . I want you to always be my husband, Kieron. This is something we

can get through together, if you'll help me. I want to try. I want to make sure this never happens again."

"I expect you do," he said. "We're always hearing what you want."

"That's not fair," Sarah said. "And it isn't true, either."

"It's true," he said. "You're selfish and self-centered, Sarah. You want the world to run your way. When it doesn't, you want someone to organize things so that it changes back again. Things break and you want to put them back together as if nothing had happened. We've had this argument before, and it won't produce any more result now than it did the last fifty times. I'm going out."

"To her?"

"Out," he said. "Never mind where."

"Don't leave me like this, Kieron," Sarah said. Her voice broke slightly, and she struggled to keep the tears back. Damn it, why are we so weak? she thought. "Please don't go."

"I have to," he said. "I promised to meet someone."

"Is it more important than our marriage that you meet this—this someone?"

Kieron just looked at her, his handsome face set and sullen. He wasn't going to listen any more: she knew that expression well after all these years. She tried just one more time.

"Kieron," she said. "Let's be adult about this. I understand that these things happen. Men are different from women, their needs stronger. It's probably something lots of married couples have to face at some point in their lives. There's a first time for everything."

Kieron looked at her coldly, and then raised a perfectly-judged eyebrow of contemptuous surprise. He shook his head sadly and opened the door before he spoke.

"Good God, Sarah," he said. "Do you think this is the first time?"

Sarah winced at the memory, and drew her cape more closely about her body. The wind was stronger now—no wonder they were calling Chicago the Windy City! It had grown late as she daydreamed her way along State Street.

She heard the great bell in the Court House toll the hour, four o'clock. She would have to hurry; Alice, the nurse, would have Katie ready for her. Sarah pictured her daughter's cherub face peeping over the bedhead: bright blue eyes, white-blond hair, and a smile to melt the heart and banish the momentary pain that came when she relived the awful moment of discovering that Kieron Conway no longer loved her. Something in Sarah had died that day, and now she clung to Katie's love as another would cling to a lifebelt in a stormy sea. It was the only real thing left in her life, that and her work. Her husband lived with her, he talked to her, he shared their common domestic problems, paid the bills. All the mundane things that did not matter. But he no longer cared for her at all. She knew it by the stoniness of his face when she embraced him, the stiffness of his body if she reached out to him in the night. He cared only for his own world and his own life and for the women who came into it and went out of it. He did not care if he hurt Sarah, or how much he did it. He did not care for her lost friendship, or whether she missed her friends when he took her away from them. She lived in the finest hotels, ate the best food, wore the most expensive clothes money could buy, and she was utterly wretchedly lonely. Except for her daughter, her beautiful darling Katie.

"We can't go on like this, Kieron," she said once.

"Which way is that?" he said, deliberately obtuse. He didn't even look at her and it made her angry. She tried to suppress the anger because she knew that if she got angry she would cry, and if she cried he would storm out, using her tears as an excuse to leave, shouting something over his shoulder about hysterical women. Her voice trembled and she damned herself for caring. Why don't I let him go? she wondered. But she knew she could not.

"I love you, you know," she said softly. "Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Oh, Jesus Christ, Sarah," he said uncomfortably. "Are you going to start all that again?"

It was no use. The tears came, a trickle and then a flood. She could not stop them. They rolled in huge drops down her cheeks. She sat silently, her breast heaving with

the unsuccessful effort she was making not to cry, but the sobs still escaped her lips.

"Oh Kieron," she sobbed. "Why can't you love me?"

"God damn it, woman!" he snapped. "Look in the mirror and see!"

She buried her face in her hands, letting the sobs come freely, and heard the door slam behind him as he went out, pretending rage to cover his relief at having been given a good exit. Damn, damn, damn! Sarah thought, angry at her own failure to control her tears. After all those years he still had that power over her. Cruel he could be—and he was. His tongue had an edge like a razor, and he used it mercilessly. He was more and more careless about concealing his infidelities and yet, somehow, she loved him still. She cursed herself for being stupid, berated herself for not using half the intelligence that God had given her, and still, *still* something inside her made her love him.

They had come to Chicago at the insistence of Augustin Daly, who had convinced Kieron that touring *Mimi*, with Sarah in the role originally written for her, would be a winner. In that he had been right. Their notices had been glowing, welcoming "a star of the first magnitude back into the constellation from which she had been so sadly missed," as one critic unblushingly put it. There was rarely an empty seat in the theater, for audiences—even Chicago audiences, which were considerably more sophisticated than most—were not often privileged to see an actress of Sarah's stature, an actor of Kieron's fame, "on tour." The box-office receipts were gratifying proof that Daly was a step ahead of his peers, as usual. They had another week of this engagement to play before moving on to Denver, Salt Lake City, Virginia City and San Francisco. Sarah had not demurred when she learned that at last she would be going back to where it had all begun. It was all ancient history by then, anyway; it was extremely doubtful that anyone there would remember Sarah Malone who had been a clerk in the Carver store on Market Street. She met John McCullough and Lawrence Barrett, joint directors of the California Theater on Bush Street. McCullough talked with great energy about the changes going

on in San Francisco—all San Franciscans were great “boomers” for their native city, Sarah had discovered—and it was not too difficult to lead the subject around to Theo. McCullough knew him well, he said, for Carver was a rival, in a business sort of way, of his backer, William Ralston.

“I suppose he has a big house, servants, all that kind of thing?” she asked artlessly.

“Oh yes, ma’am,” McCullough said. “All of that and more.”

“And his family?”

“Family? Oh, you mean his brother? He’s back east, so I understand. In the railroad business, and shipping.”

“No wife, no children?”

“Nary a one, Mrs. Conway,” the theater owner said. “I reckon Theo Carver’s too fly a bird to let any woman put salt on his tail, if you’ll pardon the expression.”

Imagine, she thought. Theo had never married. She smiled, feeling obscurely flattered and vaguely guilty at the same time. She was able to learn no more. Kieron came back and the talk turned to more mundane things, billings and percentages and scenery and the rest. She left the men alone and went to play with the baby. She was still in the nursery when Kieron came in. He stood in the doorway, his figure framed against the light, and she sensed his hesitation. He was bothered about something.

“You’ve never spoken about San Francisco,” he said abruptly. Surprised, a little taken aback, she turned to face him.

“That’s right,” she said, quietly.

“McCullough says you were asking about someone named Carver.”

“Yes. I knew him once. I knew a lot of people in San Francisco.”

“And this Carver—what was he to you?”

“It’s a closed book, Kieron,” she said.

“I’ve a right to know,” he said. “I am your husband.”

“No, Kieron,” she said sadly. “Not any more.”

It was a cruel thing to say and she regretted saying it the moment the words had left her lips, but it was the truth and it silenced Kieron. She loved him deeply, pas-

sionately, still, and she knew that no matter what he did or where he went she would always love him and forgive him and understand him. Well, Sarah consoled herself. I'm not a child any more. Perhaps it was too much to expect romance to survive. The odds are too high. Perhaps it was inevitable that a man should find younger bodies more appealing, unlined faces less of a reminder of his own passing years.

She knew all of Kieron's moods—his arguments, his brilliance, his occasional perversity for its own sake. She loved him and admired him for all those things. Yet strangely enough it was those same qualities in her that he now disliked. He did not want his women emancipated. He wanted to play God, to confer the great gift of himself upon someone who would be suitably awed. He could not do that with Sarah as he could with some wide-eyed soubrette whose experience was as limited as her vocabulary. Kieron expected each woman he made love to to bring something to his life which he had not experienced before, and that was the outlook of a boy, not a man. So be it, Sarah had decided. Let the boy go out to play and maybe one day he will come home a man. Many years had passed, but still the man had not come home. All she had was the emptiness in her heart, an emptiness dispelled only by the bright, loving eyes of her daughter Katie. She smiled as she thought of the child, and just for a moment she looked like a young girl again. Her footsteps grew lighter as she hurried down the street towards her home.

Ezra Carver cared little for Jay Gould and even less for Jim Fisk, but he knew better than to let his dislike show. They were a strange mix, those two; but they were powerful. Gould was a small, delicate-looking, unostentatious man who spoke very softly, almost apologetically. Fisk was the very opposite, a scoundrel recognizable on sight, bejeweled, porcine and vain. He called himself "The Prince of Erie"—taking his title from the railroad in which he and Gould now had the controlling interest—and even in profligate New York his life style was considered scandalous. He talked loudly and incessantly, a Niagara of bombast. He boasted of his coups on the Exchange, his railroad and steamship holdings, the theaters he owned, the clubs he patronized, the restaurants he favored. He was prodigally, crudely extravagant. They told a story about his going to the races at Jerome Park. Leonard Jerome, rich as Croesus, turned out in a stunning four-in-hand; Fisk had appeared in a carriage drawn by three pairs of white horses and three of black, with gold-plated harness. The coach had two negro postillions on the back balanced by two white men on the leaders, the negroes wearing white and the white men black. The barouche itself was loaded to overflow with a bevy of Fisk's "actress" friends, and, as always, the place of honor next to Fisk himself was occupied by his mistress, Josie Mansfield.

"Fisk," Ezra said, nodding brusquely as the fat man waved an imperious hand at him. Stiff in formal wear and

starched shirt, he moved through the throng, saying hello. Sam Ward's dinner parties were famous in New York; everyone who was anyone angled for invitations to them. Ezra knew that his being invited was strictly business and did not mind at all. He had no social pretensions. He would sit through dinner with a smile on his face, bide his time. The important thing was to have his private interview with Ward after dinner.

Theodore had arranged for a letter of introduction to Ward McAllister, the brother of Theo's friend and former legal adviser in San Francisco. The patrician McAllister was the power behind the throne of New York's ruling élite. He arranged everything that the Vanderbilts and Astors did or did not do. No one wishing to be someone could afford not to know—and to cultivate—Ward McAllister. Ezra found the man to be an unutterable snob and a complete fool, but that was unimportant. McAllister had arranged for Ezra to meet his cousin, Sam Ward. Ward was called, not altogether affectionately, "King of the Lobby" and was the best-known—or most notorious, depending upon one's sympathies—of all the intermediaries between a venal Congress and the endless line of "promoters" wishing to purchase its favors. Ezra had been to Washington many times during the war, and had even managed to swing a few deals in the echoing lobbies of the Senate. He knew that for what he had in mind he needed bigger guns. Sam Ward was the man to muster them. He could effect in months what it would take Ezra years to achieve alone. Ezra had no intention of standing in line like a down-and-out at a Save-a-Soul Mission. He knew what he wanted, and he was prepared to pay whatever it took to get it. Pa had been right: you paid for everything eventually. In time or money or sweat or blood or all four; but you paid.

He took a glass of champagne from the silver tray presented to him by the liveried footman, and damned his luck to see Fisk bearing down on him like an ironclad at full steam.

"Like to talk a few things over with you, Carver," the fat man said, pushing past the people near Ezra. He did not appear to notice their angry glares at being jostled

like street urchins. "Couldn't spare me a minute, could you?"

Ezra knew what Fisk wanted. The new brokerage firm of Fisk & Belden in which the fat man was a partner was looking for business, and Fisk wanted Ezra's—perhaps also because, by having it he would also have inside knowledge of Ezra's plans and thereby profit twicfold. It was an advantage that Ezra Carver would not have given his own brother, much less the posturing Fisk. He saw that a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman had come up alongside the promoter, linking her arm through Fisk's.

"I make it a practice never to discuss business in the presence of beautiful women, Fisk," Ezra said, dodging the issue by flattering Fisk's mistress. Josie Mansfield's big, black-lashed eyes glowed with feline delight at the compliment.

"My, sir!" she said. "Have a care or you'll quite turn my head! Fisk, introduce the gentleman."

"Ezra Carver, m'dear," Fisk huffed. "Carver, Miss Mansfield."

"I'm honored to meet you at last, having admired you for so long from afar," Ezra said.

"Well, Mr. Carver," she replied, "you have a fine line. Shall I desert Fisk for you?"

"Shouldn't do that just yet, m'dear," Fisk said, before Ezra could reply. "Carver ain't got his first ten millions yet, have you, Carver?" His belly shook and he made a wheezing noise. It was some moments before Ezra realized that the fat man was laughing.

"What line of business are you in, Mr. Carver?" Josie Mansfield asked. Her voice was soft and low-pitched. Ezra wondered what in the name of God she saw in a man like Fisk.

"Shipping, ma'am," he said. "A few railroad interests. Nothing as grand as Fisk here, of course."

"How fascinating," the girl said, her eyes saying much more. She really was very beautiful, Ezra thought. And forward, that was the word. Everyone knew about her relationship with Fisk, but it was hard to imagine her actually caring for that gross lump of blubber. So it had to be the money; it took money to pay for the kind of

dress Josie Mansfield was wearing. It was cut from heavy black silk, in what they were calling the Empress style, with deep flounces of black lace over bands of white satin. Josie's presence was striking, positive; men turned covertly to watch her, women pretended not to see her, nor to see their men looking at her. She looked at a man directly, her gaze almost challenging, a faint light that might have been amusement in her eyes. Or was it, perhaps, self-mockery, Ezra wondered. At any rate, she gave the impression of offering every man some kind of unspoken dare.

"Carver's settin' himself up in the railroad business," Fisk boomed. "Might give us all a run for our money one day, eh, Carver?"

"It's a nice thought," Ezra said, wondering how to get away before Fisk got the topic round to where he wanted it, "but I'm only small fry and you know it. Besides, Miss Mansfield, I don't have Fisk's, ah, political expertise!"

"Hah!" Fisk exploded, coughing over his champagne. "That's rich, that is! I like it. Political expertise—very rich, Carver!" His belly shook again, but none of the laughter reached his eyes. Ezra smiled; everyone knew that Fisk and his partner Gould—whom Ezra could see across the room, nodding and smiling and keeping an eye on Fisk without making it too apparent—were in with the Tweed "ring," the Tammany gang which controlled the city's politics and judiciary. In any other civilized city in the world they would be in jail, Ezra thought. Here—gross, vulgar, and even ridiculous though he was—Jim Fisk was a millionaire.

"You shall sit next to me at dinner, Mr. Carver," Josie Mansfield said imperiously. "Fisk will see to it, won't you, Fisk?"

"'Course, m'dear," Fisk said, puffing on his cigar and swigging down the rest of his champagne in a gulp. He seemed heedless of the spill trickling down his triple chins and dripping on to the ruffles of his shirt front. His diamond studs were as big as nailheads, and Ezra shook his head as Fisk waddled off to make the necessary seating arrangements. How could you hate such a man? As well hate a toad for being a toad.

Fisk gone, Josie Mansfield slipped her arm through Ezra's and smiled up at him with the mischievous glee of a young girl who has outwitted her chaperon.

"Now, Ezra—" She cocked her head to one side, smiling like a conspirator. "I can call you Ezra, can't I?" She didn't wait for a reply to her question. "You must introduce me to Mrs. Carver!"

"My wife died some years ago," Ezra said.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Josie Mansfield said, plainly not. "You're here alone?"

"I was half-intending to—"

"Oh, you mustn't sit with any of these stuffy people!" she said. "We must find you someone pretty to hand in to dinner." She stood on tiptoe, looking over the heads of nearby guests. The drawing-room was quite full; Sam Ward rarely invited less than twenty-five people to share his munificence. "Come with me," the girl said.

"No, really, I—" Ezra began, but too late. She took his hand and towed him along, weaving a path between the other guests. She seemed oblivious of the attention she was attracting, although Ezra felt sure she could not be. Every eye in the place was on her. She squealed with delight as she saw whoever it was she had been looking for.

"Jenny!" she called out. "Jenny!"

Ezra felt very conspicuous, as gawky as a farm boy at his first dance. He felt a vague resentment towards the Mansfield woman for making so much noise and fuss, and damned her for so obviously enjoying being the center of attraction. She tugged on Ezra's hand and he went forward reluctantly to be confronted by a small girl with brown hair and eyes. She looked at him with a disinterest as polite as his own.

"Jenny, this is Ezra Carver, who's an absolutely lovely man who says the sweetest things and he's dying to talk to you," Josie Mansfield said, all in one fast rush, without taking a breath. "I must get back to Fisk!" She rushed away, not even looking back at them, gone in a whirl of black silk. I wonder why she always calls him Fisk? Ezra wondered. He looked uncomfortably at the girl.

"Are you a friend of Miss Mansfield's?" he asked her.

"Not really," she said. "Are you?"

"No," he said, with more vehemence than he had intended. "Nor of Fisk's either!" He ducked his head as people turned towards him. He hadn't realized how strongly he had spoken.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Sorry I was foisted on you this way. I'd make a better job of apologizing if I knew your name."

"Bruce," she said. "Jenny Bruce."

"Please accept my apology, Miss Bruce," he said stiffly. "I had no intention of intruding on you. It was a pleasure to meet you."

"Don't go," she said, putting a gentle hand on his forearm. "You don't have to—unless you want to."

Ezra looked at the girl in surprise and she smiled.

"You mustn't worry about Josie," she said. "She doesn't mean any harm. She just likes thrusting people together, to see what happens."

"I see," Ezra said, not seeing at all.

"She's lovely," Jenny Bruce said wistfully. "Isn't she?"

"So I'm told," Ezra said.

"Oh, Mr. Carver," she said and giggled. "Don't be pompous!"

"I'm not being pomp—" Ezra stopped in mid-word and smiled into her smiling face. She was right but it annoyed him. Simultaneously he wondered why what this slip of a girl thought should matter one way or another. He found himself just a trifle confused by the directness of her gaze. She was looking into his eyes without coyness or artifice. There was a small smile lurking at the corners of her mouth.

"You're right," he admitted. "That was pompous. Yes, she's pretty."

And so are you, he thought, although he did not say it. She had fine brown hair parted in the middle and drawn back into a chignon. Her forehead was broad and high, her green-brown eyes bright and intelligent. She had high cheekbones and a mobile, soft mouth. She was little more than five feet tall, with a slender waist and creamy shoulders bare beneath the lacy shawl she was wearing.

"You're staring, Mr. Carver," she whispered, and Ezra

felt his face go red with embarrassment. Damn the woman! Was she making fun of him?

"That's because you're worth staring at, Miss Bruce," he said, determined to outface her, play her at her own game. She was saved from the necessity of replying by the sound of the dinner gong reverberating in the hall. Ezra offered her his arm, bowing slightly like a gallant. She looked at him for a long, long moment and during it Ezra's heart felt as if someone had taken it in his hand and squeezed it.

They sat together at dinner and talked almost incessantly. They ignored everyone around them except for the most perfunctory of remarks. Josie Mansfield watched them with a dark and knowing smile which Ezra pretended not to see. He did not like admitting that he seemed so entirely predictable to someone as cat-clever as the Mansfield woman. At the same time he did not care a damn even if he was. He liked this girl. She was unpretentious, her charm unforced. No one would ever call her beautiful, but she was bright and intelligent and there was a hint of rebellion, of recklessness, behind her pertness. He hardly tasted Sam Ward's superb cuisine, the artichoke soup, the whitebait in shrimp sauce, the Little Neck clams, the fresh asparagus in creamy mayonnaise, the beef *au Madère* or the saddle of lamb, nor the endless procession of vintage wines served with them. It was just food, and he was no gourmet. Jenny Bruce filled his eyes and mind. It was just pure pleasure to meet a woman who did not automatically defer to one's every remark, agree with one's every sententious pronouncement. She was gay and alive and she laughed at things he said, and listened wide-eyed when he told her about some of his adventures in Nicaragua, or Havana, or England, or out in California. He did not realize he was trying to impress her and he was so obviously enjoying doing it that Jenny Bruce made no attempt to stop him. He was a refreshing change from the would-be Lotharios who besieged her, the young town dandies who sent her perfectly judged gifts of flowers and candy, who penned her bloodless verse vowing undying love but whose intentions were considerably less poetic. She was an aspiring actress and, as such, Jenny knew that

they saw her as fair game. Plenty of aspiring (and successful) actresses were; the assumption that all were equally so was widespread among the richer and more idle of New York's young scions.

"You must tell me about yourself," Ezra said finally, "I've talked enough. I want to know more about you. Where you come from, how you happen to be here this evening. How you spend your time. Everything."

"Everything would take a long time," she said gaily.

"That's all right," he said. "I have a long time."

Jenny Bruce looked at him exactly as she had looked at him when they went in to dinner. It was a direct and unequivocal look, one that most men were unused to getting from a woman, other than women of a certain class. It was a look which said: do not lie to me, do not pretend.

She saw the surprise and confusion in his eyes. He doesn't know what to say to me, she thought, and somehow his uncertainty was endearing.

"Well," she said, "to begin with: I am an actress."

"Ah," he said. "An actress." There was no nuance in his words, no innuendo. Thank God for that, she thought. Too many of them repeated the word as though it were synonym for "whore."

"I am with Wallack's company," she said. "Do you know it?"

"I'm sorry," Ezra said. "I'm not much on the theater."

She told him about James Wallack, who had owned a theater called the National, situated on Church and Leonard Streets. That was in the 'thirties. When it was destroyed by fire, Wallack teamed up with the management of Niblo's Gardens, opening his second New York theater in 1852, the Lyceum at Broome and Broadway. He had given Laura Keene her American debut.

"Laura Keene," Ezra said. "I know her name for some reason."

"She was in the play that President Lincoln was watching the night he was shot," she said. "*Our American Cousin*."

"I told you I knew nothing about the theater," Ezra said ruefully. "I'm afraid I didn't even know the name of the play until you told me."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "Let's talk of something else."

"No, no, go on. You were telling me about Wallack."

"You're sure?" she said. "You're not bored?"

"I'd be bored if you didn't talk to me," he said.

"Hmm," she said. "I think you're flattering me, Mr. Carver. Are you?"

"Yes," he said. "Now will you go on?"

They both laughed, and Jenny resumed her story.

"Wallack was one of the great theater managers," she said. "He gave some of the most famous American actors their New York opportunities. Edward Sothorn, Kieron Conway, Matilde Heron, Agnes Robertson—"

"They're all just names to me," Ezra apologized.

"It doesn't matter," she said again. "I'm sure the names of your stock market cronies would be just as foreign to my ears. But I must say I'm surprised. I would have thought you'd like theater-going, Mr. Carver."

"I've never had the time," he said, wondering why he should somehow feel ashamed to admit it. "I prefer the real world, anyway."

"You don't feel the need for make-believe once in a while?"

"Once in a while," he said, and again their eyes met.

"Wallack," she said briskly, refusing to let the silence expand. "He bought a new theater. At Broadway and 13th. Ran it for three years until he died, in 1864. Then it passed into the control of his son John Lester, the only one of his four sons who went into the theater. It's he for whom I work."

"I thought actresses worked for different managers, in different theaters."

"Some—indeed, many—do," she said. "However, Wallack's has its own repertory company, Mr. Carver. I am a member of it. Not a very important one, I hasten to add. But maybe one day I will be."

He remembered what it had been like to be twenty-three, shining sure that one day all the dreams would come true. It was a delight to see the hope of it in her eyes, and Ezra encouraged her to go on talking about herself.

She was born and bred in New York, she told him, Jennifer Mary Bruce, daughter of an Englishman who'd married a Philadelphia girl of German descent. Neither of them had ever had the slightest interest in or connection with the stage. Jennifer left her convent school at fourteen. She was studying elocution at Professor André Bernardi's establishment in Washington Square when she attended a performance of Shakespeare's *Richard III* at Burton's Metropolitan Theater, and saw the twenty-four-year old Edwin Booth, appearing for the first time before a New York audience. By the time Booth had completed his engagement, Jennifer Bruce had seen him as Shylock, Lear, Romeo, Petruchio, Richelieu, Sir Giles Overreach, Claude Melnotte and Sir Edward Mortimer, and she had also formed the unshakable resolve to become an actress.

She made her stage début at the age of seventeen as Juliet. Wallack was told about her, a gauche and yet promising newcomer, and quickly took her under his wing. She had served a three-year apprenticeship with Wallack, and was beginning to get more important parts in the plays being staged at his Broadway theater.

Ezra and Jenny talked animatedly until the ladies withdrew, leaving the men to their cigars and brandy. The conversation now turned to business; several of the men present were in insurance, and talked of nothing but the disastrous fire in Portland, Maine, which had caused a loss of ten million dollars' worth of property. Ezra half listened, killing impatient time until they rejoined the ladies. He did not want to talk business. He wanted to talk to Jenny Bruce.

"Pretty little thing, isn't she?" Fisk said, leaning over. He knocked over a fingerbowl, spilling water across the damask tablecloth. He ignored both it and the footman who hastened to mop up the mess.

"Yes," Ezra said, only just managing to keep the snap out of his voice. The man was greasy as a pimp.

"You met Wallack, did you?"

"Wallack?" Ezra said. "Is he here?"

"Opposite you," Fisk said, and there was something faintly malicious in his tone. "To your right. The dark-haired fellow with the actory face."

Wallack was a slender, extremely handsome man of about forty, Ezra judged. He had a mobile face and fine large eyes. His hair was as glossy and black as boot polish, and in talking he used his hands a great deal. He looked manly and self-assured, and Ezra's spirits sank. He wondered what the relationship between Wallack and the girl was, and knew that Fisk was watching his reactions closely, spite all over his face. He shrugged.

"Good-looking chap," he said.

"Successful, too," Fisk said. "Fine actor. Good businessman. The ladies adore him—you probably noticed that outside. Josie says he's the answer to a maiden's prayer."

"Oh," Ezra said, unable to resist the temptation. "She told me you were, Fisk."

"Hah!" he said, spluttering bits of food, his belly jiggling again with that silent laughter. "That'll be the day, Carver! That'll be the day!"

There was no escaping the man, and Ezra spent the rest of his time at table doing his best to avoid giving Fisk any commitments. The man was shrewd, persuasive, no doubt about it. Anybody who'd come up, as Fisk had, from being a hostler in Isaac van Amburgh's circus and before that a peddler in rural Vermont had more than his share of smartness. You couldn't like the man but, even so, it was hard to condemn him. He was only doing what any hundred men would gladly do, given his chances. Fisk had no principles, but he made no bones about not having any. There was no humbug about him at all. He was gross and profligate and outrageous—and he wallowed in it.

Finally they went into the drawing-room together, and try as he would Ezra could find no real excuse to duck Fisk and go over to talk with Jenny Bruce. He got involved in a totally boring conversation about the women who were crusading for equal rights, a subject in which he had not the remotest interest. If women wanted equal rights, let them work for them as hard as men. If they did not or could not or would not, then why should they be given what others had to earn? It seemed quite straightforward to Ezra, but he refrained from saying so. He

listened and nodded politely as they spoke of Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott and the National Woman's Rights Convention.

Josie Mansfield rescued him yet again, and took him away from the group.

"Come along, Carver," she said. "You don't look ready to give women equal rights just yet. Come and talk to Jenny and me."

He was unprotesting, hesitating only for a moment when he discovered that Wallack was standing protectively behind Jenny Bruce's chair. She smiled up at him.

"I wanted to come over and join in," she said.

"You're interested in the subject of equal rights for women?" he asked. "Universal suffrage, all that nonsense?"

"I am and it's not nonsense, Mr. Carver," she said spiritedly.

"Now, Jenny, don't get started on that," Wallack said easily. "I want to talk to Mr. Carver. Jenny's been telling me all about you, sir. You seem to lead an eventful life."

"Not really, Mr. Wallack," Ezra said. "Deadly dull compared to yours, I'd say."

"Ah, you're modest, Mr. Carver. You live real life. We actors only indulge in shadow play. There's no flesh on the bones of it. You're not a theater-goer, I hear?"

"Alas, I rarely have time for it," Ezra said.

"How about universal suffrage, Mr. Carver?" Jenny said sweetly. "Have you time for that?"

"Even less," Ezra said, sticking to his guns, and Wallack laughed.

"Well said, sir!" he told Ezra. "It's time someone stood their ground and gave Jenny what she hands out. Perhaps you ought to come and see her on the stage. It's my opinion she will become one of our best young actresses. One of the very best!"

"Careful, Wallack!" Fisk boomed, wallowing over to join them. "She'll be askin' you for more ducats, if I know anything about actresses!"

"Well, Mr. Fisk," Wallack said. "You are talking of actresses, sir, I am talking of acting."

It was a subtle shaft, but wickedly sharp. For quite five

seconds Fisk did not react, and then all at once a dull tinge of anger stained his florid face. Fisk opened his mouth to speak but Wallack was already handing Jenny Bruce to her feet, ready for an impeccably timed exit. Ezra, missing nothing, saw Josie Mansfield's hand close tight on Fisk's arm. Her face stonily forbade him to say another word. She pulled the promoter away with an ungracious good night to the actor and actress, her face twisted with anger at Fisk's clumsiness. As for Wallack, he appeared not to have noticed anything remotely untoward. Ezra could have hugged him.

"We'll bid you good night, Mr. Carver," he said. "A pleasure to have met you, sir."

"Mutual, Mr. Wallack," Ezra said. Then to Jenny Bruce, heedless of Wallack's approval or otherwise: "Shall I ever see you again?"

"Why, Mr. Carver, you may see me any night," she said, smiling. "On the stage of Wallack's Theater. Do you remember where it is?"

"Broadway and 13th," he said. "I remember."

She smiled again, and once more Ezra saw that something in her eyes that he had seen earlier at the dinner table. His pulse jumped at the thought.

"I'll come tomorrow," he said. "Tomorrow evening."

"Well done," Wallack said. "Jenny, I think you've made another conquest!"

They went out, her arm through his, and Ezra felt a stab of envy. As if it were some strange new creature, Ezra examined the emotion, wondering at its presence, curious about its cause. She was a pretty enough little thing, but no beauty. An actress: it could mean anything. Wallack had put Fisk in his place for suggesting otherwise, but his last words had hinted that Jenny Bruce was more than used to making "conquests." Lovesick fools, he means, Ezra thought, like me. Was there some relationship between the girl and Wallack? He envied the man his assurance and style. Wallack was elegant and handsome; he had made Ezra feel provincial and dull. I don't need them, he thought. I don't need her. I don't need anyone.

Sam Ward's study was thick with stale tobacco smoke when Ezra was finally shown in by the immaculate butler. He wondered how many supplicants had already preceded him, seeking boons from this newest kind of king. At dinner Ward had been the gracious, impeccable host. Here he was all business. Glasses and decanters of heavy Waterford crystal stood on the long walnut table: bourbon, brandy, port. Sam Ward did not get up as Ezra came in. He was seated in a swivel chair alongside an old roll-top desk, from the pigeonholes of which folders, docketts and envelopes spilled in crumpled profusion. Ward swung round to face the table and waved Ezra to a chair.

"Take a seat," he said. "Have a drink."

"Thank you," Ezra said. "I'll take port, if I may."

"Sensible man," Ward said approvingly. "Hard liquor'll kill a man faster than rattlesnakes. Now . . . I'm told you want some advice?"

His manner was courtly, his voice soft and unemphatic, but Ezra was not fooled. The man was as tough as whang-leather. Sam Ward might now wear the deep lines of wisdom, his fine-featured face framed by snow-white hair that swept in wings alongside his handsome head, but he had lived in one lifetime enough adventures for six other men.

He had married one of John Jacob Astor's daughters, Emily. She died tragically young, and Sam did the unforgivable—he remarried quickly, and at that to a "nobody." He compounded this error by letting the Ward (that is to say, the Astor) banking house fail, and was sent abroad to expiate his sins. The family bailed him out financially on condition that he stayed out of the country until the old man died, and Sam departed not only hastily but gladly. In Europe and South America he won and lost several more fortunes. Along the way he became a connoisseur of wines, paintings, sculptures and fine bindings, a superb raconteur and an elegant and incisive wit. He returned to New York when old J. J. died, the living embodiment of the old saw about bad young men often becoming good older ones. Sam set up house on Fifth Avenue, and soon filled his mansion with a magnificent library and a remarkable collection of fine paintings. None of these accomplish-

ments, though, however remarkable, would have opened a single door of New York society to him had Sam not possessed one other attribute—his palate. Who in New York would have dared to question the judgement of a man who, when handed a glass of wine, could identify with a mere sip its provenance and vintage? He became the indispensable oracle of the gilded leaders of fashionable New York and Washington society. No dinner party worth calling a party could be given without Sam Ward's imprimatur; his counsel on all matters gastronomic was considered *de rigueur*. His own dinner parties were the most sought-after events on the social calendar, and to be invited to one was a sign of one's "arrival" in New York. Unlike those who sought his advice, however, Sam Ward chose his guests from a very catholic cross-section of New York society. Actors, musicians, painters, sculptors and writers rubbed shoulders with merchant princes, railroad tycoons, shipping magnates, politicians and land speculators at the Ward mansion. All of them were there for what use they could be to Sam Ward, or because of their need of the King of the Lobby in their turn, and they begged his aid equally as anxiously as any socialite hostess seeking status.

"Not advice, sir," Ezra said. "Help."

"Help comes a little more expensive than advice, boy," Sam Ward said, his smile showing how tired he was. "You know how hard it is to get good help these days."

Ezra acknowledged the little joke with a grin. He knew that Sam Ward had been thoroughly briefed by Ward McAllister, to whom Ezra had given a long lecture about the fledging Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad project.

"I want to build a railroad across the continent," Ezra said without preamble. "I think there's millions in it."

Ward looked at him shrewdly. "Go on," he said.

"I don't want to go east-west," Ezra said. "I want to go south-west."

Ward said nothing, just nodded again. I wouldn't want to play big-money poker with this one, Ezra thought. There was a silence. Ezra sipped the port wine. It was a very good one.

"You'll have to tell me your plans," Ward said. "In detail."

"That requires me to trust you completely, sir," Ezra said.

"That's right."

It wasn't even take it or leave it. It was said as a fact, like, today is Tuesday.

"I've done a survey," Ezra said. "Detailed for the first eight hundred miles, then sketchy, mapping the route for the rest of the way. I've got some holdings already. Trackage that would get cars from Chicago to Kansas City."

"You have?" Ward said, sitting up slightly. It was the first real interest he had shown. "That's something. How'd you put it together?"

"Bits and pieces," Ezra said. "I've been doing it for nearly ten years. Since long before the war."

"You're a patient man, Carver."

"Yes," Ezra said.

"What would your route be?"

"After Kansas City?"

"Right."

"From Kaycee to Palmyra, Kansas, and then down to the Cimarron River, south-west of Fort Larned. Then up into the mountains in Colorado, through Rat Pass and down to Santa Fé."

"I know that country," Ward said. "That's the Santa Fé Trail, the old wagon road."

"Mostly, yes," Ezra said.

"Good thinking," Ward told him. "You've done a survey, you say? Who's your engineer?"

"Judah Harvey. He comes from—"

"I know Harvey," Ward said. "Everybody knows Harvey. What's his estimate?"

"About twelve thousand dollars a mile on average," Ezra said. "More in the mountains."

"Knowing Harvey, he'll have been optimistic," Ward said. "Total mileage?"

"Eight hundred miles from Kansas City to Santa Fé."

"And that makes what?"

"A total construction cost of about nine and a half

million dollars," Ezra said. "Adding other costs, for contingencies and so on, thirteen million."

"Thirteen million dollars," Ward muttered. He gazed up at the cherubs in the corners of the ceiling. In the silence Ezra looked around the beautiful room the old man used as his study. An archway led in from the library; beautifully bound books in tooled leather bindings lined both the walls flanking the heavy oak doors. On every wall there were more bookcases all glass-fronted. There were three shelves in each. The cabinets were all intricately patterned, with delicate marquetry; the books looked old and valuable. They had gold edging on the tops, and the titles on the spines were blocked in gold lettering. Sometimes the spines also had geometric designs tooled on them in gold. Many of the titles were in Latin. *Theaetatus*, Ezra thought, vainly trying to recall the classics, who wrote that?

On top of the bookcases were many priceless *objets d'art*. Ezra was no expert, but he did know something about clocks. Hartwell Carver had been a collector, and his son immediately recognized the one above Sam Ward's desk as a Benjamin Gray bracket clock. It was probably worth more than most working men earned in a year. There were beautifully patterned vases with slender Oriental-looking necks, and painted Oriental fans with lacy designs of bridges and long-legged birds. Behind them on the walls was a profusion of paintings.

Ward obviously had no time for the sentimental trash most of his contemporaries were buying. Everything hanging in that study was good, and nothing was less than two hundred years old. Ezra had been told that Sam Ward's collection was one of the finest outside Europe, and now he believed it. He gazed with genuine pleasure at the Dürer woodcut, the two sketches by Rembrandt van Rijn, a portrait of Philip of Spain by Velázquez, and another of a lady playing a mandolin by Vermeer. Ezra mentally saluted the man. Each painting was carefully hung in relationship to its neighbor, and the whole display was a breathtaking blend of color and beauty. Sam Ward did not just have good taste: he also had style.

"Well, young man," Ward said at last, stroking his

luxurious white moustache with the back of his hand, "getting a charter is the first thing. And getting a charter will take a lot of work. And a lot of money. A lot."

"If money is all it takes," Ezra said, with considerably more confidence than he was feeling, "let's get started."

"Hold on, now, tiger!" Ward said, stopping Ezra with an upraised hand. "I said it would take a lot of work and a lot of money. I didn't say that that was all it would take. You can't go at Congress like a bull at a gate, boy. You've got to bide your time, bide your opportunity. It's not as if you can go to Washington and buy a couple of Senators and a few Representatives the way you'd buy an apple off a pushcart!"

"I thought it was," Ezra said.

"You thought like a lot of people think, then," Ward said flatly and without admiration. "They all say it: Washington is rotten from bottom to top, and you can buy anyone or anything you want. Well, boy, it's not quite that cut and dried. There are more than enough honest men in Washington, and a sensible man doesn't let that slip his mind. There are some politicians, of course, more amenable to persuasion than others. Only, you see, boy, they're like virgins. They have to be persuaded to do it. They want to believe they're going to enjoy it, of course, but they don't want it to hurt. They want to be told it'll actually be good for them!"

Ezra smiled at the old man's analogy. Sam Ward might be a rogue—and there were plenty who said he was—but he was at least a stylish one. New York was the city of the cudgel, the blunt instrument. It was a pleasure to watch someone use a rapier for a change. Ezra admired style in a man more than anything else, perhaps because he was conscious of his own lack of it. He did not mind being beaten in business, he would even stand for being tricked or double-crossed, as long as it was done with style. Once again he thanked his stars that Theo had produced the means by which he could meet this wily old pirate.

"What I'd like to do, Mr. Ward, is to leave my affairs in your hands," he said. "Have you handle the whole matter for me. If you'd consider it."

Ward smiled, showing good teeth.

"You're a smart young fellow," he said. "I like that. Better still, you know the right things to say—and what not to say. I like that even better. You never asked my terms."

"I don't need to, sir," Ezra said. "Whatever you say will be fine with me."

"Don't be too generous, Carver," Ward said waspishly. "We'll have an agreement."

"Then you'll do it?"

"I'll do it. I'll look after your interests, if that's what you want. And I'll do it better than you'd ever do yourself. There's only one condition, boy."

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't you ever try to bamboozle me. If you want to end our arrangement, you come and tell me. No tricks, no double-crosses, no corner-cutting. We'll shake hands now. That'll be our contract. We'll end it the same way, if you've a mind to. Do it any other way and I'll spend every penny I possess to break you. I'm a good friend, Carver, but as an enemy I'm hell on wheels!"

"That's fine with me," Ezra said. "Can I make a condition, too?"

"What would that be?" Sam Ward said warily.

"That you never try to bamboozle me," Ezra said. "Or I'll feel obliged to react in exactly the same way."

"Damn my eyes!" Sam Ward said. "You're a new one on me, Carver. Yes, you are!"

"Good," Ezra said. "When can we get started?"

"Soon as you like," Sam Ward said. "Where do you plan to commence building, exactly?"

"Near Kansas City," Ezra said. "Kansas is easy country to lay track in."

"Well then," Sam Ward said, lighting another cigar. "You're going to need a Kansas politician. The bigger the better: a Congressman, maybe. Do you know any Congressmen?"

"Not yet," Ezra said, and Ward let out a creaking laugh that sounded like a snake moving around in a wastepaper basket.

"I like you, Carver," he said. He heaved himself up

out of the swivel chair, and they shook hands once more, a final sealing of their bargain. "Go find yourself a Congressman. Let me know if you have any difficulties. And before you go, let me give you one final piece of advice—free."

"Free?" Ezra said, with a wry smile.

"Just this once," the old man said. "It's from Euripides. 'They say the gods themselves are moved by gifts, and gold does more with men than words.' It's worth remembering."

"It is indeed," Ezra said.

"You come and see me whenever you're so inclined," Sam Ward said. "Good luck, boy."

"I will," Ezra said, reflecting on the fact that Sam Ward read Euripides.

When they got out of the wagon the flat, hard heat of the Kansas sun was like a physical blow. The hot wind that never seemed to abate fanned Ezra's face. The endless brown prairie stretched away to where the shimmering horizon merged with the brassy sky. The land was featureless and flat, empty, inhabited only by gophers or fools.

They clambered to the top of the bluffs, with Judah Harvey volubly pointing out the advantages of building in this kind of country, talking about the army wagon roads built a decade earlier, about Federal grants and construction costs. His enthusiasm was boundless, but it grated on Ezra. He was glad to remain silent and let the little engineer do all the work. God, it was hot!

"I'd say we could bring her in at an average of about twelve thousand a mile," Harvey said. "Maybe even less on one or two stretches."

"Dollars?" said Senator Singer. "Twelve thousand dollars? A mile?"

"Building railroads is an expensive business, Senator," Judah Harvey said, smiling like a confidence trickster, "but profitable. Enormously profitable. If the right men are engaged in it."

His tone left no doubt that when he said "the right men" he meant men like Senator Curtis B. Singer. The Senator from Kansas was a short man, thickset and past his prime. He was a partner in several Kansas City and

St. Louis law firms, and also had real-estate interests in those cities. He was not a wealthy man by New York or San Francisco standards, but out there in Kansas he was what they called "well set up." More important from Ezra's viewpoint was the fact that Singer had plenty of political muscle. They said he more or less controlled the political machine, and that the office of the District Attorney bowed, when bidden, to Singer's judgement. A nice way, Ezra had thought, of saying that the Senator could either hang you or pardon you. It was worth keeping that in mind. He looked at Singer thoughtfully; he knew more about the man's life, public and private, than any other living human being did. Since Ezra's arrival in Kansas he had had a team of private investigators on Singer's tail. They had filed their report just a few days earlier. As soon as he had read it Ezra sent the Senator an invitation to make this "exploratory" trip to Palmyra, a dozen miles south of Lawrence, Kansas. The original report, which had cost more than two thousand dollars to compile, was safely lodged in a bank vault. A copy, handwritten by Ezra himself—he did not trust anyone else—nestled in the inside pocket of his jacket. It would be nice, he thought, if he did not have to use it. He needed Senator Singer. The Senator could get him the support he needed in Kansas legislature, and from its duly-appointed representatives in Washington. Curtis had been a vociferous supporter of the original Railroad Act of 1862, and equally vocal on behalf of the Missouri Pacific and other projected routes. If the legislation to obtain a charter for the projected Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad were introduced by the distinguished Senator from Kansas; if Sam Ward worked his unseen miracles in the lobbies and parlors of Congress; and if it all came together at the right moment, the fledgling railroad had a good chance of becoming a reality. Congress would grant it a charter, and the work of raising the money could begin.

Once he knew he had the right man—and the right handle on that man—Ezra arranged the trip down to Palmyra, where the first rails would be laid. The town was little more than a huddle of rough shanties where generations of wagon train emigrants heading down the Santa Fé

Trail had camped overnight. There was a hotel of sorts, a lawyer's office, a blacksmith's shop, a wagon repair and a harness shop, two sawmills and a sweetwater well. That was it.

The town lay a few miles behind them to the east. Off to the south, a couple of miles away, Ezra could see the glint of the Osage River. Beyond the yellow horizon lay Topeka.

"They have a saying out here, you know," Singer was jovially telling Judah Harvey. "It takes you overnight to see as far as the horizon!"

Very funny, Ezra thought sourly. He was in no mood for being sold on the beauties of the Sunflower State. Its faceless prairie stared back at him, mocking mortality. There was little good you could say about the land. The soil was poor, the timber merely sparse lines of elm, ash or cottonwood fringing the banks of the dried-out rivers. The air was as clean and clear as Singer had proudly claimed it to be, and the grass was good. Meadowlarks sang out their hearts in the brassy sky, but Ezra loved Kansas none the better for that. The place reminded him of what Oliver Cromwell had said about Ireland; not enough water to drown a man, not enough trees to hang a man, not enough earth to bury a man. One didn't even sweat in this heat. It just dried you out like jerked meat. I need a drink, he thought.

Harvey was still droning on about the topography of the land to the west, chanting a litany of rivers: Osage, Neosho, Arkansas, Cimarron, Canadian.

"If we stay fairly close to the routes of the old Santa Fé Trail, we'll have an easy run of it to Colorado," he glowed.

"Sounds magnificent," Singer said. "Must say, sounds just magnificent! 'Course, heard it said before, know what I mean? Others have said the exact same thing. It'll be interestin', what? Interestin' to see who actually builds it, as opposed to talkin' about it."

"There's no doubt it'll be done," Ezra said. "And no doubt that it will be we who do it."

"Well, hm, as to that, I'd say what the ancients said, wait an' see, my boy, wait an' see," Singer said. "You're

not the only one wants to build out here. The Union Pacific is already at Topeka, don't forget. And there's this fellow Holliday, who—"

"I know all that, Senator," Ezra said patiently. "But my plans are somewhat larger. I'm talking about going all the way to California! No railroad like this has ever been dreamed of, much less begun. It will bring settlers into this country in millions. They'll turn this prairie into productive land. They'll bless the railroad, Senator, and they'll bless the man who made it all possible."

"Meanin' you, Carver?"

"Meaning you, Senator," Ezra said, piling it on. He almost smiled as Curtis Singer's face flushed with pleasure at the flattering thought of millions blessing his name.

"Well," he said, bridling. "Like to help you. Really would. If there was some way. . . ."

"Let's talk about it," Ezra said. "On the way back."

They talked about it all the way across the faceless plains to Kansas City. Ezra tried every legitimate argument he knew or could invent to persuade Singer to support the O.K.C. Railroad. It was to no avail; the politician was playing hard to get. Maybe he was already in someone else's pocket, Ezra thought. Well, he'd just have to get him out. Pretending to accept the politician's refusals as unalterable, Ezra invited Singer to join him for dinner. He told Judah Harvey to take a walk around the town while they ate. He didn't envy the little engineer his promenade, for there was damned little to see. The town was plonked down any old how on sandy bluffs overlooking the Missouri. There weren't more than two or three good streets. Below the town, along the river bank, stood huge warehouses and those strange elevators they used out there for raising and shipping loads of grain.

Ezra and Curtis Singer ate in the overheated dining-room of the Lindell Hotel. Ezra had already seen to it that the owner, Griswold, would put them at a corner table and have a bottle of champagne on ice to welcome them.

"Well, this is fine, Carver, very fine indeed," Singer said, gobbling his way through quail and steak and pie. It was a more than adequate meal, making up in quantity

what it lacked in finesse. Ezra pretended an appetite he did not feel, making sure that Singer took the lion's share of the wine he had ordered. The Senator's face grew more florid, his brow damp with perspiration, but that was all; it slowed his guzzling not one whit.

"Well, Carver, sure you see the dilemma," he said. "Like to help you, really would, but. . . ." He spread his hands, raising his shoulders and eyebrows like a Jewish peddler. Ezra wondered why the Senator so rarely used the personal pronoun; it gave the man's speech a strange jerkiness.

"I quite understand," he said. "No need to apologize."

"Not apologizin'!" Singer said, with a little snap in his voice to show that he wasn't just anybody. Sometimes you had to remind these people who was seeking the favors, and who granting them. Some of them thought all they had to do was buy you a meal and they could say any damned thing they liked. "Glad you see it that way, all the same," he said.

"Nevertheless," Ezra said, permitting himself a small smile as he took the knife out of the sheath, "I still want you to introduce legislation into Congress to get the O.K.C. Railroad its charter."

"Didn't you hear what I just said?" Singer squeaked, his mouth falling open to reveal unchewed food.

"I heard," Ezra said, unperturbed. "Now you hear this. I shall want you to begin almost immediately."

Singer's face was stricken, his eyes bulging. The man must be mad, he thought. He must be stark, staring, raving mad!

"Damnation, sir, you're out of your mind!" he said, starting to get to his feet. "Damned madman! Don't have to sit here and listen to this!"

"Sit down, Singer!"

There was something in Ezra Carver's eyes that made the Senator flop back into his chair like a shot pigeon.

"See here, Carver," he said weakly.

"Listen," Ezra said. "Don't talk, just listen. You are going to get the O.K.C. its charter. In doing so you will probably become wealthy. I will appoint you president of the railroad, and I will see to it that you get a share of its

profits. Do you know how much money that could be?"

"Uh." Singer's brow creased. "How much?"

"You could clear a hundred thousand a year," Ezra said. "More, if the line becomes really profitable. One hundred thousand dollars a year, Singer!"

The Senator looked at Ezra Carver with eyes like holes burned in wood. Ezra was not even offering him a chance to pretend, to save face. He was buying him, body and soul, stating his price clearly and contemptuously. The contempt burned Singer's vanity like acid, because he knew that *au fond* he was ready to be bought. He felt a surge of self-disgust. He had once had ideals, beliefs. He had gone into politics because he believed that it was a poor man who went all the way through life without trying to change anything. But that had been a long time ago. There had been far too many broken promises since then, far too many expediencies and compromises, bargains and best ways out. He saw himself clearly in the mirror of his own soul, old, tired and venal. And he hated Ezra Carver for making him look.

"You, sir," he said, with as much dignity as he could muster, "can go directly to hell!"

Once again he started to get up from the table, but Ezra Carver sighed, shaking his head sadly like a man gazing down on the grave of a friend who has died of his own folly. His sigh consigned Curtis Singer's soul to torment. The older man watched without hope as Ezra reached into his pocket and brought out two manila envelopes, one bulky, the other slim. Both had the name of the Senator written on them in copperplate script.

"The envelope on the left contains a contract," Ezra said without emphasis. "Sign it and you become, effective two months after Congress grants us a charter, president of the Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad. The terms of that appointment will be exactly as I described them to you."

"No," Singer said, his voice trembling.

"The other envelope," Ezra continued, "contains a detailed report about you, Senator. Before you do anything as foolish as turning me down, I suggest you look at it."

He leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar, not looking at Singer. The politician reached across the table and, with hands that trembled slightly, opened the envelope and withdrew the sheaf of papers in it. Ezra watched expressionlessly as Singer's eyes flew across the pages. The man's skin turned deathly gray as he realized what he was reading.

"You . . . did this?" he croaked.

"No, Senator," Ezra said. "You did. My investigators merely verified that you did it. To save you the bother of reading the whole thing, let me assure you that it is both comprehensive and documented. Your visits to the home of Laura—"

"For God's sake, Carver!" Singer hissed, looking around the room in panic. "She's married!"

"I know that," Ezra said remorselessly. "I also know about your visits to Belle Reston's house in Washington, about the proceedings in the private room of a restaurant—"

"You bastard!" Singer said. "Oh, you bastard!"

"Shall I go on?" Ezra said. "Shall I paint you a picture of what would happen to you if these papers fell into the hands of some muckraking journalist, or perhaps the husband of the lady on Elm Street?"

"God in Heaven, man, keep your voice down!" Singer said, agony in every syllable.

"Understand me, Singer," Ezra said. "You'll do as I say."

"God damn your black soul!" Singer said, his voice a hiss of suppressed rage. "I ought to get a pistol and shoot you like a dog!"

"You should indeed," Ezra said, iron back in his voice, "but you won't. You're gutless, Singer. If I didn't buy you, somebody else would. I know it and you know it. Now, either go and get a gun or sign that damned contract!"

Curtis Singer's hands plucked at the reports like a dying man picking at the edges of his sheets. There was no anger left in his eyes, no strength at all. He looked like what he was, a defeated old man.

"Damn you, Carver," he said. "God damn your soul to hell!"

Ezra didn't even answer. He made no apologies to a man whose pleasures were adultery and obscene games with teenage girls in overpriced bordellos. He just took the contract out of its envelope and shoved it across the table. Singer scrawled his signature across it without a word. He looked at Ezra with empty eyes. He saw no triumph in Ezra Carver's face, no sorrow, nothing. Not even pity.

Ezra picked up the contract, folded it carefully, and put it into his pocket. Then he took out his wallet and counted out one hundred hundred-dollar bills. Singer watched in astonishment, hypnotized by the sibilant slither of the banknotes.

"Take this money," Ezra said. "Talk to whoever you need to talk to, do whatever you have to do. If you need more money, let me know. But get me that charter."

"Where will you be?" Singer said, reaching out tentatively, fingertips just touching the money. "How shall I contact you?"

"I'll be in Washington," Ezra said, his smile Satanic. "Keeping an eye on you. I'll contact you when it's necessary."

All the hope died in Singer's eyes. After a while he picked up the money and left. Ezra watched him go without sympathy. If he felt soiled by what he had done, and he did; if in doing it he had made a mortal enemy—one who would gladly see him dead in a gutter—and he had; well, so be it. You did what you had to do. He gave the waiter a signal.

"Bring me a brandy," he asked. "And make it a big one."

The bright August sunshine picked out the gilded lettering on the third-floor windows of the office building at 15 Hanover Square. "Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad," Ezra read aloud, looking up at the legend from the busy sidewalk below, feeling the glow of his own accomplishment. It had taken nearly six years of backbreaking work, seven days a week and twenty hours a day. It had eaten up the better part of his personal fortune and effectively done away with any private life he might otherwise have had. But it was done; in this year of grace 1870 the O.K.C. was a fact, a living entity. Its directors were awaiting his arrival in the ornate boardroom up the carpeted stairs.

The offices were plush and well-furnished because Ezra believed and had always believed that appearances were vital. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," he told the people who worked for him. "Don't forget it." He knew that nobody was going to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in an outfit that looked as if it didn't have a tail to its shirt, and he had made sure that the O.K.C. didn't look that way. Even so, it had seen more than its share of difficulties since President Lincoln had signed its charter that seventh day of March in 1865.

The swing doors opened into a large, high-ceilinged office, with windows looking out on to the bustle of the square. Facing Ezra as he entered was a huge wall-map

upon which was painted the projected route of the Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad. A heavy red line snaked across the continent south from Chicago to Kansas City, west across the plain to Santa Fé, south again down the Rio Grande valley to Albuquerque and El Paso, and then westwards again along the thirty-fifth parallel towards Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. There was a thinner red line running northwards up the San Joaquin valley to San Francisco.

Ezra smiled, the smile of a parent who knows that his child is precocious but is confident that its future is assured.

The office had a U-shaped counter which ran from either side of the door, its horizontal placed in front of the big wall-map. To the right was what would be the freight department; to the left would be passenger services and an express desk. The area directly in front of the route-map would deal with general inquiries, with brochures, prospectuses and a special clerk to handle questions concerning investment. Ezra had already hired a bright young fellow named Gerard Hampson to run the section.

Behind the wall on which the route-map hung were two offices; one for Ezra, the other for the partners who would be handling the day-to-day running of the New York office. Williams and Roper. Ezra lifted the counter flap, carefully sliding the brass bolt back into place beneath it. He pushed open the door of his office. The room was thick with cigar smoke, and the sunlight sliding in through the gaps at the side of the drawn blinds was like a spotlight in a theater. There was a chorus of welcome as he came in, and he nodded a greeting to his fellow directors. Twelve good men and sometimes true, he thought, taking his seat alongside Curtis Singer.

"Well, Ezra," Cornelius Roper said. "Will you take a smile?"

"Nothing, thanks," Ezra said, as the fat man got up and poured himself more madeira. "But don't let me stop you."

"You never will." Roper chortled, only faintly abashed. He was a big man, florid and fat, with a piping voice

strangely at odds with his huge bulk. He perspired constantly and profusely, forever wiping his bald pate and pendulous jowls with a huge white handkerchief. His eyes were piggy and his mouth weak, and Ezra was not fond of him at all. Roper was one of the less attractive of the prospective stockholders whom Singer had rounded up in Kansas back in 1865. To be fair, Roper had been a vital factor in the selling of the O.K.C.'s bonds. Then he had been a prominent Republican. Now he was a district judge. Soon he would be running the O.K.C. in New York.

"Well, if you've no objections, we'll get right down to business," Singer said. "Now that Ezra is here." He shuffled his papers self-importantly, and allowed himself a little pleased smile. He had got in a jab at Ezra for being later than the rest of them. It was the kind of victory that pleased small men, and Ezra let him have it.

"No objections," he said, leaning back in his chair and taking out a cigar. He clipped off the end with his gold cutter and lit the cigar with a kitchen match, taking his time, looking over his fellow directors as if seeing them for the first time. As he had done, he recalled, on that November day in the box-like suite at the Chase Hotel in Topeka.

He was not unconscious then of the irony of having the meeting in the same suite in which, only a couple of years earlier, Cyrus Holliday and the stockholders of the Atchison and Topeka Railroad had met to rename their line the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé. If anything, Ezra thought with a smile, our plans are even more grandiose than theirs were.

He looked around the room at the men whom Singer had brought together. A fat man with piggy eyes, Cornelius Roper, who was a budding political boss. Aloysius Williams, Chicago-born, bald and nervous, with the shifty eyes of a poacher. Henry Morton, publisher of one of the pro-slave newspapers, *The Clarion*. Thomas Mortimer, an attorney who started a partnership there with a man named McSween. Milton Waldman, a Topeka banker. Laurence James, an agent for some emigrant aid society. They were all prominent residents of the Territory, Singer had assured Ezra; all men who were "going places."

Peters, Stanley Morgan. Edward Vose, Jack Anderson—the Senator introduced them one by one. They all had the same shabby-genteel air of small businessmen, and Ezra wondered how he would ever weld this motley rabble into a unit with which to fight the likes of Fisk, Gould, Cooke, Durant and the rest of those eastern pirates. With a great deal of difficulty, he concluded with a sigh.

“Gentlemen,” he told them. “We have our charter. It was signed by the President a mere five weeks before his assassination. The gist of it is as follows: Congress grants us land to build a railroad westwards to the boundary of Kansas in the direction of Santa Fé, with the option of an additional line going south to the boundary of Indian Territory. We will receive every alternate section of land for ten sections in width along each side of the finished right of way, but the grant will be revoked—as will the charter—if we do not reach the border, either to the west or the south, within ten years of March 7, 1865.”

“How far is it to the Colorado border?” Morgan asked.

“About four hundred and fifty miles,” Ezra said.

“Can we build that far in eight years, starting from scratch?”

“We have nothing to lose by trying, Stanley,” Senator Singer said with a benign smile. “Let Mr. Carver here tell you the rest of his story.”

“It’s perhaps the most important part of it,” Ezra said. “You see, before we can commence operations we are required by Congress to subscribe two million dollars in stock.”

“What?” barked Roper, mopping his face.

“Two millions?” echoed Williams.

“Of course,” Singer intervened hastily, “buyers don’t have to put up the full amount on purchase. Ten per cent down is all that’s required.”

“Two hundred thousand dollars is still a hell of a lot of money in this part of the country, Curt,” Morton put in. He was a rotund, balding man who chewed incessantly on an empty pipe. His fingertips were permanently blackened by the printing ink he handled in setting his own type.

“We have several advantages that some of our competitors haven’t got and never had,” Ezra said. “Holliday

and the A.T.&S.F. people had to work against apathy. To-day there are laws permitting every county in the Territory to subsidize the building of railroads through their land. They can allocate up to \$200,000 a year if they want to."

"First they have to have it," Morton murmured.

"Right!" Waldman said. "And we're not the only embryo railroad coming cap in hand to the county commissioners asking for their money. Billy Palmer of the U.P. is already in Abilene, and he's got his hand out too. Cyrus Holliday is proposing to start building instanter—"

"That's so," Mortimer put in. "They say he'll start operations in Atchison this year."

"You're from Atchison," Ezra countered. "If that's so, why are you here instead of with Holliday?"

"Well," Mortimer said, looking down his long nose and letting a sly grin touch his face. "I think he's a goddamn liar for one thing!"

He got his laugh, and the atmosphere in the smoke-filled room lightened somewhat. Ezra gave Curtis Singer an infinitesimal nod, and the politician got up quickly and took two bottles of good sour mash bourbon from his carpet bag. Ezra uncorked them while Singer placed glasses in front of each of the men around the table. The bottles began to make the rounds, and by midnight everything was settled. Singer, Roper, Williams and Milton Waldman would travel the east with Ezra to interest investors there. The others would stump the Territory for backers, big and small.

Washington was a dismal place. It rained and it rained and it rained. The streets became quagmires, the open spaces swamps. Pigs rooted up the land around the half-completed monument to the first President. Outside the hotels, sullen negroes shuffled through the downpour to lay planks on the muddy ground so that passengers could step from hansom to doorway without getting mud halfway up their legs.

Ezra met Sam Ward at the Willard Hotel. It was an offensive hole, its carpets threadbare and filthy, its staff insolent, and its food pernicious. The lobbies were not

just crowded but packed. Wet clothes and cigars raised a fog that could have been cut with a knife and carried outside. Men's boots left huge muddy tracks everywhere. Nobody cared. This was the place where you waited for your break, made your offer, asked your favor, proposed your deal. It was where you heard the latest leaks, discussed the latest scandals, found out who was sleeping with whom, and why, and who knew, and what they were all going to do about it. Politicians, lobbyists, fortune-hunters and bums crowded the bars and restaurants. It was almost impossible to get a table in either, and the bartenders were working flat out to keep up with the shouted orders from the six-deep throng along the huge mahogany bar. The place was thunderous with male voices, alive with the sound of political machinery being greased.

"Well, my boy!" Sam Ward said. "Sit down. How are you? I've been wanting to talk to you."

He said the same thing to everybody, Ezra knew. It was part of the old boy's charm. He sat at his little table in the booth immediately to the left of the doorway into the "snug" at the end of the bar. There were only three seats. Supplicants waited at the bar, or stood gazing with mixed envy and dislike at the luckier ones summoned to the old man's table by an imperious wave of the hand or the sideways inclination of the white-maned head.

"Well, Mr. Sam," Ezra said, "I think I need some help."

"My dear boy," Ward said, with a gesture that indicated Ezra could have every penny that he, Ward, possessed. It didn't mean a damned thing, Ezra knew.

"It's not money, Mr. Sam," he said. "I want to buy something."

"You don't need me for that, my boy," Ward said. "If you've got the shekels, you can have anything you want in this town. Anything."

"What I want isn't in Washington," Ezra said. "It's in Massachusetts. But I can't be seen to be buying it. Not yet."

"Ah," Sam Ward said, leaning forward.

"There's a company I want, Mr. Sam," Ezra said. "It's called the Massachusetts Financial Agency."

"Ah," Ward said again. "You've been watching our Mr. Durant, have you?"

"He's a man to watch," Ezra said without expression. Sam Ward threw back his head and roared with delighted laughter, slapping his thigh.

"By God he is!" he shouted. "By *God*, he is!" He leaned over and picked the bottle of Krug out of the ice-bucket. "Here," he said, "have something."

"Thank you," Ezra said. "I can use it."

"Your good fortune, my dear fellow."

"This is good."

"The very best."

"I wish I could afford it," Ezra said.

"Oh, Carver, you're good," Sam Ward said, smiling broadly. "I like you, I do. I wish you'd get out of this stupid railroad business. Come into politics, man! I could have you in the Senate in three years! You'd take more out of this goddamned pork barrel in six weeks than you'll make in a lifetime out in the Territories!"

"Massachusetts," Ezra said. "Will you arrange it?"

"Well, all right," Ward said. "You're set on this?"

"You know damned well I am," Ezra said.

"Leave it to me then," Ward said. Ezra got up, finishing his champagne as he did so. "You're not going so soon," Ward said.

"You have other guests, Mr. Sam," Ezra said.

"To hell with them," Ward said. "Have some more champagne."

"When you buy that company," Ezra said, "we'll split a magnum or two."

"I'll hold you to it." Sam Ward said, and he did.

Three weeks later they got mildly drunk together in the big house on Fifth Avenue, and Ezra explained to the old man what his plans were. Massachusetts Financial Agency was a small firm with one big asset: its charter allowed it to deal in stocks and shares without being held responsible for the failure of any company whose securities it handled. Ezra planned to change its name, and to make it the contracting and financial agency which would actually build the O.K.C. Railroad. Its bills for work could then, under the law, be considered the equivalent of cash. That

"cash" in turn would be exchanged for railroad stock—at par. Showing O.K.C. stocks at par on the company's books and then selling them at whatever they could fetch on the open market once the road was working and producing profits, the company could then declare dividends to its own stockholders out of the profits realized by these transactions.

"And who are the stockholders to be?" Ward asked.

"You and me," Ezra said. "Who else?"

The second part of his plan, he told the old man, was to use his own money to pick up, through nominees appointed by Sam Ward, certain sections of railroad here and there between Kansas City and Chicago.

"Why do you want to buy railroads?" Ward asked, with vexation in his voice. "Haven't you got enough problems trying to build your own?"

"You're missing the point, Mr. Sam," Ezra said. "Suppose I get the O.K.C. built, from Kansas City to Santa Fé, say. What will I have?"

"I'll buy it," Ward said. "What will you have?"

"Nothing much," Ezra replied. "Plenty of freight, even passenger traffic, going west. Damned little coming back. I need something to haul east, Mr. Sam. And that means only one thing."

"Damn it, Ezra, stop playing guessing games," Ward said half-angrily. "I can't abide all these pregnant pauses!"

"Cattle," Ezra said. "Texas cattle."

"So help me God, Ezra," Ward said, a growl in his voice now. "One more of these breathless hushes and I swear I'll brain you with this bottle! What do you mean, Texas cattle?"

"Let me explain," Ezra said.

He had been approached in Kansas City by a young man named Joseph McCoy. McCoy was a tall, gawky-looking fellow of about thirty, Ezra judged, who introduced himself and explained that he was the youngest of three brothers doing business in Sangamon County and Springfield, Illinois. They shipped livestock—cattle, sheep, hogs and mules—via the packing plants of Chicago to the East.

"A thousand head, anywhere between eighty and a

hundred and forty dollars a head isn't an unusual shipment for us, Mr. Carver," McCoy said. "We ain't what you'd call e-normous, but we're solid, sir, solid. We'll usually have three shipments on the road at the same time, all season. We have financial resources, sir. I don't go about cap in hand, as you see."

"Very well," Ezra said. "How can I help you, Mr. McCoy?"

"I have conceived an idea, sir, an idea for opening up outlets for Texas cattle. An idea that could make millions, sir, millions."

"Millions? From Texas cattle?" Ezra frowned. "How?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Carver," McCoy said. "I wouldn't presume to lecture a man without his permission, sir."

"Lecture away," Ezra said, warming to the man. "Tell me everything. Especially the bit about the millions!"

Joe McCoy explained that Texas had an overpopulation of cattle. They had been left untended for the five years of the war, and had increased at a prodigious rate. He estimated that there were six million animals roaming free on the Texas plains and quite possibly double that number. Nobody had counted them. Nobody wanted them. Nobody knew what to do with them. There was precious little money in postwar Texas, and practically no market for cattle. Mobile and New Orleans were the only places they could be sold at all, and that only for their hides and tallow. The going rate for a hide in Louisiana was three dollars. It wasn't even worth herding the animals to the abattoir for that kind of money.

"Yet there, Mr. Carver, I espied an equation," McCoy went on. "I compared the value of cattle in Texas and the price of beef in the North. I set myself down to come up with a plan whereby I could conjoin supply and demand. The longer I thought about it, the more convinced I became that it could be done, and that it could be an enormous moneymaking proposition. It was then, sir, that I decided to approach you."

"Why me?"

"As I understand it, sir, your railroad is to join Chicago and Kansas City, and then proceed westwards towards Santa Fé and the Pacific?"

"That's correct, but we're a long way from—"

"Bear with me for a moment, sir," McCoy said. "If I could persuade the Texas ranchers to bring their cattle up through the Indian Territory to Kansas, to wherever your railhead happened to be—"

"Then they could be trans-shipped direct to Chicago!" Ezra said, seeing it now. "Of course. We would buy from the drovers in Kansas, ship the cattle to the packing plants, and pocket the difference."

"You have it, Mr. Carver," McCoy said. "You have it in one."

"I'm afraid, Mr. McCoy, that I can't have it all," Ezra said, reluctantly pouring cold water on the idea. "The O.K.C. is still nothing more than a paper railroad. Unless you can wait to bring your plan to fruition, a year, two—"

"No, sir," McCoy said. "I'm afraid that's not possible."

"You're set on beginning immediately?"

"The cattle are there, sir. And so is the railroad."

"You mean the Eastern Division?"

"Yes, sir, I do. They are already near Abilene. I see myself forced into an alliance with them."

"You don't sound as if it's to your liking, Mr. McCoy."

"It ain't, sir," McCoy said. "Damned if it is."

"You've already talked with them?"

"I have, sir. They are, to say the most, apathetic about the whole scheme. In fact, sir, they have so far broken every single promise they have given me."

"Then why do you do business with them?"

"Because, Mr. Carver, the time is *now*!" McCoy said. "The Texans are ready. If I were to leave it for a year, or more, someone else would step in. Be sure of that, sir. Be sure of that!"

"And you'd be out in the cold."

"Exactly."

"How about the Missouri Pacific?"

"Do you know what they told me, sir?" McCoy said. His quiet voice became agitated and he slapped his knee testily with his narrow-brimmed hat, the very picture of a mild man tried beyond endurance. "They said I *had* no cattle, sir. They said that not only did I not *have* any cattle, but that I was not likely *ever* to have any! They

called me a speculator, sir, a speculator! I was told to leave their offices and never come back to them. And I never shall, Mr. Carver, not though my life depend on it!"

Ezra shook his head, remembering his disbelief of McCoy's story. It seemed impossible that his competitors could be so short-sighted. Here was a painfully honest businessman bringing them an idea that might provide the one element of profit that all the westbound lines lacked—some kind of freight to fill up the empty eastbound trains. And the best that McCoy was being offered was halfhearted support from the Kansas Pacific.

They had parted amicably, mutually regretting that they could not join forces. Ezra had been favorably impressed with McCoy, even if the man was more dreamer than entrepreneur. He had kept himself informed of the stockman's progress. McCoy had settled upon Abilene as a shipping point, they said. So far no cattle had materialized, but the word was that McCoy's plans were creating great interest in Texas.

Ezra still had his eye on that cattle trade. If he could stitch together a direct route from Kansas prairies to the Chicago packing plants he could monopolize the cattle industry on the one hand and put the Kansas Pacific's nose out of joint on the other. All he had to do was swing his rails south and west, below the line that the K.P. was taking. Towns would spring up along his right of way. He could persuade McCoy to organize the loading chutes, the pens, the corrals, everything that would be needed. He was sure of that and he told Sam Ward so.

"It's ambitious, Ezra," Ward said. "You sure it isn't a bit too ambitious? It's a big load for one man to carry."

"I've got broad shoulders, Mr. Sam," Ezra said.

"Well, my boy, let's hope you have. You may need them."

"How much will it cost?" Ezra said. "Have you any idea?"

"I don't know," the old man replied. "How much have you got?"

Early in 1867 Ezra became president of the Finance, Construction and Contracting Corporation of Massa-

chusetts. There were three other directors, all straw men. Two protected the interest of Ezra's sons, the third that of Sam Ward. The corporation was capitalized at two million dollars, every cent of it Ezra's. He managed to scrape the money together alone. He wanted no partners other than Sam Ward. With Ward as a partner he needed no others.

Ezra knew what he wanted and went after it like a shark after blood. Using bonds of the embryo O.K.C. Railroad as security he borrowed \$65,000 to buy a house on Park Avenue, just north of 39th Street in New York's Murray Hill district. He left the furnishing of the establishment to Ward, who turned it into a palace—albeit, as Ezra sourly remarked, a damned expensive one. He staffed the place with maids and flunkys enough for royalty, and then threw open to support, impress, or, best of all, out-manuever.

Within a year, through the medium of his Massachusetts corporation, Ezra's interests had extended into many new areas: freighting, shipping, finance, manufacturing, express companies, cotton and railroading. Was there a stretch of trackage that might be useful to the fledgling O.K.C.? Then mortgage the cotton mills in Nottingham, England, and with that money buy it through nominees in Europe. Add those shares to other shares and those to still others, like a man making a patchwork quilt. It looked as if it had no shape at all and then all at once it began to look like what it was: a small empire.

To achieve his objectives Ezra Carver acquired and disposed of companies as another man would discard a hand in a penny-ante poker game. He took neither pleasure nor interest in them. They were merely pawns in a larger game that he was playing, and he did not notice—or did not care—that his actions affected hundreds, thousands of lives. His interest in a company could drive the price of its shares through the ceiling over-night, his declaration of intent to dispose of one ruin its other shareholders even faster. He did both, often. He expected no praise when speculators made huge profits by watching his moves; nor was he surprised to become the object of their vilification when the reverse proved to be the case.

His enemies revived a nickname they had not used for years; they called him "the Back Bay Bastard" once more. It did not either please or displease Ezra Carver. He was well aware of the strength of legend, and to be famed if not famous, feared if not admired, was no bad thing. He found that he did not mind having no close friends, for without them he was not tempted to relax, confide, slacken pace. When he did need a friend he had Sam Ward. And when he needed anything else he had Jenny Bruce.

After his first visit to Wallack's Ezra went no more to see the actress at the theater. Of the play in which he saw her he remembered nothing five minutes after he left the auditorium. He had not even recognized her when she made her entrance, so different did she look in stage makeup and costume. He was totally unable to make any judgement at all about her acting since he had no criteria by which to measure it. She seemed to be quite good. The audience applauded noticeably more loudly when she stepped forward to take her bow at the end of the play. He felt an inner glow; pleasure at the secret knowledge that he knew her, that he would see her afterwards.

He took her to Delmonico's, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure at the prospect of the dining there. It wasn't awe; he thought it would take quite a lot to awe her. Nevertheless, she made no effort to conceal her delight at such needless extravagance.

"I know it's sinful to spend so much money," she said to him, "but it is lovely once in a while, isn't it?"

The waiters brought the fish, serving it with a flourish. Another hovered at Ezra's elbow while he observed the ritual of smelling the cork and sipping the wine. When they had gone away Jenny made a *moué*, and Ezra asked her what was wrong.

"Why do they put all this goo on the fish?" she said.

"The sauce? It's a speciality of the house," he told her.

"It's goo," she said, scraping it off. She ate without pretended "daintiness." When she was finished she patted her stomach and smiled.

"You have to feed me every four hours or I make rude noises," she said. "I'm a healthy little animal."

"I think it would give me pleasure to feed you every four hours, seven days a week," Ezra said, realizing what he had said the moment he said it, and realizing, too, that he had meant to do so. Well, well, he thought, waiting to see her reaction. Her look was direct; she did not evade the implications of what he had just said.

"I'm a good actress, Ezra," she said.

"I believe you," he said.

"I'm going to be even better. In ten years from now. Or however long it takes."

"You plan to stay in the theater?"

"Yes," she said, as if it was a strange question. "Of course."

"You've never thought of . . . any other career?"

"I've thought of several," she said. "I've thought of getting married, and decided that I don't want to. I don't need it."

"Most women seem to," he said.

"Most women believe that having babies and keeping house are the finest things to which a woman can aspire," she said. "I do not."

"Being an actress, however . . . ?" he prompted.

"Is *something*," she said, earnestly. "Don't you see, Ezra, it's something? Something of my own, something that doesn't need a man or a wedding ring to make it valid!"

"Surely a man has something more to offer a woman than the prospect of babies and housekeeping?"

"What? You mean love?"

"Well . . . yes. For instance."

"Ezra, love and marriage are not indivisible!" she said. "The one may exist without the other. If all the marriage laws were repealed tomorrow, everything that is good about love would continue to exist. The same, alas, is far from true of marriage."

"You sound like that woman," he said. "Mrs. Woodhull."

"I take that as a compliment," she replied. "I think that Victoria Woodhull is often right."

"I can't agree with you," he said.

"You don't have to."

He glared at her for a moment, and then she laughed, and he laughed with her. There was no point in fighting at their first dinner engagement.

"You'll have to get used to the fact that I have a mind of my own and I want to use it, Ezra," she said. "I'm sorry, but that's the way I am. I haven't any intention of learning how to simper every time some man pays attention to me."

"Are there so many then?" he said, feeling a pinch of envy.

"There are some, of course," she said. "I'm an actress and I'm not ugly. To some men that is like a sign saying 'easy meat'."

"And Wallack? Does he have some . . . special place in your life?"

"No, not Lester. We are friends, of course. But not lovers."

"I never thought that," he lied, caught again off balance by her outspokenness. He wasn't used to women at all, and the women he was used to never said exactly what they thought in the same words that men used. Jenny Bruce was making him re-examine every preconception he had about women; and making him realize how many of them there were. It seemed that nothing but the truth would suit her; and so he spoke the truth.

"I want you," he said. "Do you understand what I mean?"

"I know," she said. "You want to go to bed with me."

She jarred him off balance yet again. He flushed, and glanced around guiltily. Somehow he felt it necessary to convince her that he felt more than lust.

"Of course I want that, too," he said. "But more than that. I think—"

"Don't!" she said sharply. "Don't tell me you think you are in love with me!"

"Why not?" he said. That wasn't what he had been going to say.

"Because I don't wish to hurt you. Or anyone."

"How could you do that?"

"By not—eventually—loving you. That's what you would want. Expect, even."

"No," he said. "I don't believe I would."

"Yes," she said. "It always ends that way. 'I thought you loved me' must be one of the saddest things any of us ever says. But all of us say it, sometime or other."

"Love, love, love," he said. "It's cant, half of it. People talk about love when they mean lust, fantasy, egotism. Most of it is sentimental posturing, as false and painted as one of your plays. *I'm* talking about something else, something that makes a man and a woman complementary to each other. Brain as well as body. Good God, girl, do you think I only want to sleep with you?"

"I don't know," she said. "I only know what you say you want."

"Jenny," he said, "I have a big house. I have plenty of money. I have two sons. I have enough work to keep me going all the hours God sends, and I enjoy doing it. I am what they call successful. It used to be enough, but it isn't any more. Not since I met you."

"Why me?" she said. "There's nothing special about me."

"Academically speaking, you may be right," he said with a smile that robbed the words of any sting. "But I cannot speak academically. I want you in my life. I need you, Jenny. What do I have to do?"

"Wait," she said. "Give me a little time. Don't crowd me so fast."

"I find that hard to contemplate," he said.

"I understand that," she said, and she was a trifle breathless herself. Everything was happening so fast. She had never intended that anything like this should take place. She had to mark out some territory, decide her guidelines.

"But Ezra, you must understand, too," she said. "I won't play the part of the cozy 'little woman' who sits knitting until she hears your footfall. I won't play the baby daughter or the quiescent child. I have my own life and I intend to go living it. You will have to accept all that. I

won't sit waiting around until you're ready to use me."

"You don't mince your words, girl."

"Only fools do," Jenny Bruce said.

Ezra bought and furnished a small house on West 29th Street, a brownstone that Jenny adored from the moment she moved into it. There was money if she needed it; not a lot, she would not accept a large amount. Enough, she stipulated, so that she could have her independence in the theatre, to be able to turn down a role if she did not wish to play it without worrying about losing the salary. She would take nothing else. He wanted to give her jewelry, horses, carriages, servants, clothes. All the paraphernalia by means of which other women proclaimed themselves "kept" she rejected.

"I am your friend," she said. "Your loving friend. Treat me as that and no more. Give me nothing that you would not give a loving friend."

"You can have anything you want," he said, for he was not skillful at this kind of conversation. "Just name it."

"You're lucky, Ezra Carver," she said.

"Why lucky?"

"Lucky I'm me and not some other gold digger," she said with an impish grin. "Or I'd ruin you!" She stretched the verb theatrically, and made claws of her hands, pretending to scratch at his eyes. "I'd roooooo-in yer!"

"I like buying you things," he said. "I've got plenty of money. I have to spend it on something."

"Spend it on your boys," she said.

"They have all they need," he replied, his voice going cold. Ezra did not like anyone to interfere with the arrangements he had made for Hartwell and Huntingdon. Not even Jenny.

She had met them often, and grown to like them. Hartwell was slim and self-assured, with dark-blond hair and green eyes, just growing out of gawkinsness. He was mad about horses, rode marvellously and talked intelligently. The younger boy, Huntingdon, was shyer and seemed much more vulnerable. Jenny noticed that he constantly sought approval from his father, approval which Ezra

rarely provided. Where whatever Hartwell did at school seemed to get his father's undivided attention, when Hartwell's sports successes always meant another present from Ezra, Huntingdon was ignored. Ezra showed only the most cursory interest in the youngster and, although Huntingdon tried gallantly, somehow his attempts to be bright and self-assured never quite succeeded. He was like an actor with a difficult part that eluded him, Jenny thought, just unconvincing enough to make you ache to help put it right, knowing you never could. Hartwell was smart, neat, alert and intelligent. Huntingdon was clumsy, untidy, yet infinitely appealing.

Eventually, of course, Ezra told Jenny about his wife, and how she had died, and Jenny divined the reason for Ezra's hostility towards his younger son. She even tried in subtle ways to change Ezra's attitude towards Huntingdon, but it had hardened and set into habit long before she knew either of them. Perhaps, she consoled herself, she had slightly lessened Ezra's severity, but that was all. For her own part, she could not help but love the boy, and try to reduce his open vulnerability. And sometimes hate Ezra for what he was doing to his own flesh and blood.

Judah Harvey's survey was completed by March 1868. He estimated the cost of building the railroad at approximately \$12,000 a mile. After the first forty miles were built the line would qualify for Federal loans of \$16,000 a mile over the flat Kansas plains. When they got into the mountains these would escalate to as much as \$48,000 a mile, but Ezra knew only too well that his construction costs would also skyrocket. Mark Hopkins of the Central Pacific had told him that they were budgeting \$150,000 a mile in the California sierras and it often wasn't anything like enough. It was 192 miles from Kansas City to Wichita, Judah Harvey said. He had laid out his route through Johnson, Douglas, Franklin, Osage, Coffey, Greenwood, Butler and Sedgwick Counties, intersecting the Arkansas River about forty miles north of the state line. It would be relatively easy to drop a spur line down to the borders of the Indian Territory, if it became necessary, to fulfill the requirements of the charter.

Ezra was satisfied with Harvey's survey, but it posed some enormous problems. The first was that he was going to have to spend another two million dollars before he could qualify for government help. Harvey had given him eight counties in Kansas from which to solicit help. Each could fund the railroad by up to \$20,000, but it was optimistic to suppose that even half of them would do so. Even if they did, it would still leave him a million to find. There would be some income from the sale of land

alongside the railroad as it inched out across the plains; but he was not sanguine of its amounting to much. No, he had to raise the money himself, and it was a parlous time to do it.

The sale of stocks in the railroad was at a virtual standstill. Roper and Williams were doing their best, as was Singer, but eastern investors were shying away from the growing number of railroad projects being offered. It was a buyer's market. Ezra had been to Boston, to New York and to Washington a couple of dozen times each, but results were always poor. A few sales, a few thousands of dollars, but never the big money he needed to get the project under way.

"Show us some concrete proof that you can get this railroad running, Carver," the money men would say, "and we'll put in capital like a shot."

Ezra pointed out to them that he already had some millions of his own dollars already tied up in the project, at which they smiled benignly as though to say, folly, folly. They would not be torn apart by grief if Ezra Carver went to the wall.

There was only one way to do it and that was to persuade one or more of the counties along the proposed route to vote a bond issue to subsidize the railroad. Without hesitation, Ezra sent Curtis Singer out to Kansas City with a suitcase full of money and instructions to buy as many county commissioners as it took to get a bond issue voted.

"Do you realize what you're asking me to do?" Singer said, outraged but unconvincing as ever.

"Of course," Ezra said imperturbably.

"But if anyone found out, man, I'd be— I'd be—"

"Ruined, Senator?"

"Exactly!" Singer said. "It's pernicious, Carver! I won't do it! It could mean the end of my career in the Senate, everything. I won't do it, d'you hear? I won't do it!"

"Yes you will," Ezra said.

"Tell me how!"

"There are one hundred thousand dollars in that suitcase, Senator," Ezra said. "It may only cost half of it, a quarter of it, one tenth of it to do what I want done.

What happens to the rest of it does not concern me. I only want you to get one election started. Do you understand me?"

Singer looked at him and then at the case with the money in it. Greed misted his eyes like fog.

"Well," he said, as if reluctantly. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to try."

"That's my Senator," Ezra said. "Try."

He saw the hate in Singer's eyes as the man went out of the room, and shrugged. Men like Singer were not worth losing sleep over. They would always hate the stronger man who used them, and never understand why the men who used them were strong.

As it turned out, the voters of Douglas county, Kansas, were not as easy to manipulate as Ezra had manipulated Curtis Singer. Despite the Senator's having persuaded the county commissioners to call an election for a bond issue—Ezra did not ask and did not wish to know how—the issue was defeated at the polls. Ezra's telegraphed reply was brief and to the point.

TRY AGAIN, it read

WILL NEED MORE MONEY, Singer wired back.

HOW MUCH? Ezra wanted to know.

ANOTHER TWENTY, Singer said.

DRAFT ON WAY, Ezra replied, SO ARE ROPER AND WILLIAMS.

Damn the man, he thought. He knew that if he had been in Kansas the election would have been a success, the bond issue voted through. He didn't know how he knew it; he just knew that it would have been so. He stared out of the window at hansom cabs splashing through the puddles left by an unexpected summer downpour, and thought of the hard, flat heat of Kansas. He smiled. Roper and Williams wouldn't enjoy that at all, he thought. They had bitterly resented being sent into the wilderness, slogging from farm to farm, canvassing like backwood politicians; but Ezra would hear no excuses.

"Go out there and tell them what the railroad will do for them," he said. "Tell them it will be their friend, their banker, their supporter. Tell them whatever you think will make them sympathetic, I won't give a damn what.

Say the railroad will benefit the country. Tell them about the new towns that will grow along the track, and how that will increase the value of their land. Tell them how much easier it will be to ship their crops, their livestock, to market. If you think money will help, loan them money. Singer has plenty."

"How much has he got?" Williams asked.

"Enough," Ezra said. "But listen to me, boys: I want votes, not scandal! You can get them as easily with whisky as you can with money, or for nothing if you know the right words. Don't be crude. You'll spoil the whole boiling if you go at it hamfisted. A few dollars to mend a broken plough is one thing. A couple of free drinks, that's all right, too. But keep it low key, do you understand?"

"Aye," Roper said. "We're to be bumpkins, is that it?"

"Now you mention it," Ezra said, smiling for the first time. "I think you're well suited to the job."

They glared at him when he laughed out loud at his own poor jest, and left less than pleased with the task they had to perform. Once in Kansas, however, they saw no escape and so they worked with a will. By July the county commissioners had called another election, and this time it was plain sailing. The bonds were approved by a two-to-one majority of the electorate, and the commissioners were authorized to issue twenty-year 7% bonds to purchase O.K.C. stock. Singer, Roper and Williams moved on to Franklin county, then Osage and Johnson, Coffey, Greenwood, Butler and Sedgwick in quick succession. Johnson, Greenwood and Sedgwick were also persuaded to issue bonds in amounts ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

WE HAVE \$650,000 GUARANTEED POSSIBLE FURTHER \$150,000 TO COME Roper wired from Kansas City. WILL YOU ANNOUNCE COMMENCEMENT OF WORK?

Ezra read the message, smiled, and sent off one of his own. ACKNOWLEDGE YOU'VE COMMENCED WORK, it said. NOW GET BACK HERE SOONEST. PLENTY MORE WAITING.

It was no joke. Working mostly alone, sometimes with the assistance of a clerk or one or other of his co-directors, Ezra was involved from early morning until late at night

in the thousand details which required his attention, the hundreds of negotiations large and small which only he could finalize, the dozens of meetings he did not dare or desire to entrust to anyone else. He was due shortly to meet with a consortium of British steelmakers from Port Talbot in Wales. More than anything he wanted to guarantee his supply of rails, and he knew he could not compete in volume with the giants of the eastern lines, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio, Gould, Cooke and the rest of them.

He immersed himself in a paper given to the British Association in 1856 by Henry Bessemer, *The Manufacture of Malleable Iron and Steel without Fuel*, the better to be informed in his dealings with them. As yet there was precious little production of steel or even pig iron in America: two million tons was the figure projected for 1870 and the following year by the big mills. If all the railroads began building at the same time there was going to be a run on steel and the price would go through the ceiling. Ezra had no intention of being caught at the wrong end of the a price war, and was already making forward plans. Sam Ward introduced him to a dour young Scot named Carnegie who had worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad until the end of the war.

"Aye, an' a good job it was, too," Carnegie said. "But a mon who's saved his bawbees ought to do something more with them than stick them in a bank. So I listened gey carefully to everything that Thomas Scott said, and put ma money where he put his. I'm pleased to tell you that it's paid dividends, Mr. Carver. I cleared fifty thousand last year—small beer to a man like yourself, I ken, but more than enough for me."

"And you're putting it all into steel?" Ezra said. "You don't consider that risky?"

"Aye, it's a risk," Andrew Carnegie said, stroking his whiskers, "but it's a calculated one. You see, Mr. Carver, I believe a man can safely put all his eggs into one basket—as long as he keeps a damned close eye on the basket!"

Steel was but one of Ezra's concerns. There was a group of European bankers arriving on the *Carpathia* with whom he must speak. The idea of selling O.K.C. stock in

Europe, especially to prospective immigrants who might also buy the land which the railroad owned, was a heady one. It had come up for the first time when he talked to Henry Villard, who had been a famous newspaper reporter during the war. Villard married the daughter of William Lloyd Garrison, a tub-thumping abolitionist and reformer who had once publicly burned a copy of the Constitution as a protest against Congress's compromises over emancipation of the slaves. Garrison now espoused all sorts of hare-brained causes: prohibition of liquor, fair treatment for Indians, votes for women and God alone knew what else. Jenny had met his daughter at one of the meetings these women had, and through her the Bavarian-born Villard. He was a small, dapper, civilized man, who expressed himself more than willing to introduce Ezra to the group of German bankers when they arrived in New York.

"Perhaps you can do me a small favor in turn, Mr. Carver," he said.

"If I can," Ezra replied, "I'll be glad to."

"You know I work for the American Social Science Association?"

"In Boston, yes. I believe my father supported its aims."

"I am its secretary, Mr. Carver. It is my belief that a handbook for immigrants, published in French, German and Swedish, and distributed throughout Europe, would be of inestimable value. I would wish some financial support for such a venture, which of course would make reference to the best transportation systems and the best parcels of land for sale. If you see my point."

"Very clearly," Ezra said, "and I would like to help. Let me know when you need me."

They shook hands and he saw Villard out personally, shaking hands with him again on the doorstep. It was another form of bribery, he supposed. He watched the German march off south on Park Avenue. Bribery or support, whatever you called it, it didn't matter as long as he met those bankers.

They said you needed two sons-of-bitches to build a railroad: the sonofabitch who raised the money and the

sonofabitch who spent it. Ezra needed a construction boss. He knew there was no hope of getting Strobridge, the man who had built the Central Pacific, and who was reputed to be the toughest of the lot of them. He would have liked to have tried for Jack and Dan Casement, but he knew he could never offer them enough to win them away from the Union Pacific. The best available man was Michael Carrington Wyatt, whose position with the troubled Kansas Pacific was in the balance.

The Kansas Pacific had originally been the Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western. Born in 1856, it had come in 1863 under the control of Samuel Hallet and Theodore Carver's old friend John Charles Frémont. Frémont had lived up to all of Ezra's expectations by spoiling every opportunity he got. Lincoln had removed him from command of the western armies in 1862, but Frémont still had the pull in Washington to get the L.P.&W. included in the Railroad Act. He changed the road's name to Union Pacific, Eastern Division, although it had no connection at all with Durant's transcontinental railroad. There was money trouble—to be fair to the man, they said Frémont had not been part of it—and the upshot was that Sam Hallet was killed by his engineer, Orlando Talcott, whom Hallet had fired for writing to President Lincoln about the cheapjack work being done by the railroad. Frémont had sold out, and the new directors had hired Wyatt. He had done a fine job for the railroad, but he had been offended when his directors rewarded his work by telling him to cut his costs. Wyatt would not build a line on the cheap and said so forcibly. The directors told him to get on with it or else. Wyatt simply walked off the job and jumped a train headed east. Ezra located him in Boston, and got Sam Ward to arrange a dinner quickly, making quite certain that Michael Wyatt was among the guests. He also ran a quick check on Wyatt's background.

Michael Carrington Wyatt—the middle name was for a general who had once commanded Fort Phil Kearny and was a close personal friend of his father's—had served with the Union army during the war, and spent the last two years of it in the Department of the Missouri, fighting Indians like his illustrious namesake. There was little of

the land between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains which he had not personally crossed on foot or on horseback. Desert low or mountain high, raging river or dry arroyo, Wyatt knew how to get men across them and on to their destination. He was big and bluff and solidly built, with hands like hams and eyes that told you he would take no backchat from any man.

"You were born here in Boston, general?" Ezra asked Wyatt when they met at the dinner party in that city.

"Yes, Mr. Carver, I was," Wyatt said. He had a cropped, graying beard, and his hair was short and brushed flat on top of his head. His eyes were the most piercing blue that Ezra had ever seen. "And please, just 'mister' like everyone else. I'm no longer in the service."

"You've had some exciting times on the plains, I'm told."

"A few, sir, a few," Wyatt said.

Ezra smiled. He liked a man who understated things, and Wyatt was certainly doing that. Any man who'd been brevetted general for gallantry in the field had seen his share of the action. Wyatt had been in command at Fort Dodge, Sam Ward told Ezra, when word was brought in that hostile Cheyennes were out in force, raiding outlying farms and ranches, cutting telegraph wires to throw off army pursuit. The winter weather was particularly cruel, with temperatures getting down to forty below, and a wind blowing that they said you could sharpen knives on. Undeterred, Wyatt assembled every able-bodied man on the Fort into a strike force and set off after the Indians. Thirteen men froze to death before he came back but when he did there wasn't a hostile Indian within one hundred miles of the Arkansas River. Wyatt's Raid had found its way into legend when his one-time commander, General Ulysses S. Grant, had telegraphed Fort Larned asking for information on Wyatt's whereabouts.

"Nobody knows where he is," the telegrapher had informed him, "but you can damned sure see where he's been."

Wyatt and Ezra talked for a while about railroading, and Ezra discovered the engineer was a theorist as well

as a builder. More than ever he was convinced this was the man he needed.

"Would you be interested in discussing a job with the O.K.C.?" he asked bluntly. "The pay is very good."

"No," Wyatt said, his eyes following a dark-haired girl who walked past them and smiled. Ezra nodded, drawing on his cigar. Nobody said it had to be easy.

"Twice what you're earning now," he observed mildly.

"How do you know what I'm earning, Mr. Carver?"

"I don't," Ezra said. "But whatever it is, I'll double it."

"Not interested," Wyatt said, adding a polite nod as thanks for the offer. He was not really listening any more. His eyes were moving across the crowded room, as if he was trying to find someone he knew.

"Do you get up to New York at all?" Ezra asked.

"Be there next week," Wyatt said absently.

"Dine with me," Ezra offered. "Next Tuesday?"

"All right," Wyatt said.

"Perfect," Ezra said. "Eight o'clock suit you?"

"Sure," Wyatt said.

"You know the address?"

"Everybody knows your address, Mr. Carver," Wyatt said. "You'll excuse me?"

"Of course," Ezra said, watching him cross the room swiftly towards the dark-haired girl who had smiled at him earlier. Nobody said it had to be easy, but this one might be easier than some were, he thought.

Now he watched Wyatt across his own table. He had hardly spoken to the engineer all evening, so engrossed was Wyatt in the dark-haired girl sitting next to him. Her name was Susan Hawkes, and she was a friend of Jenny's, a member of the Wallack Company. Ezra smiled and poured himself more wine. It had been pure luck that Sue Hawkes had been at the dinner party in Boston, and that Michael Wyatt had been so smitten by her. Her presence at Ezra's table tonight owed nothing at all to pure luck. If that was what it took, then that was how it would be done. Some men wanted money. Some needed fame or applause or both. Others sought material things: houses, paintings, *objets d'art*. Throughout all human life

ran one common thread: desire. In Wyatt's case it was physical rather than cerebral. He obviously needed the glow of conquest, the shrine of admiration in the eyes of a pretty woman. It was not hard to see why. Wyatt's wife was a mousy woman who sat now listening to the boring lecture old Harry Seaman always launched into when he had a captive audience. His subject was Boston during the Revolution. Harry could actually make it sound dull, and tonight was no exception. Agatha Wyatt was listening abstractly to the old fool while her eyes dwelt hotly on the animation in her husband's face as he talked to Sue Hawkes. It is not difficult for a wife to know when her husband is trying to impress another woman, for she knows all his tricks, every nuance of his charm. Agatha Wyatt was envious of Sue Hawkes's ability to bring her husband to sparkling life as she perhaps no longer could. There would be sulks in that household tonight, Ezra concluded, making his own plans.

The following week Susan Hawkes sat next to Michael Wyatt at another dinner, this time one much more intimate. During the course of it she confided that she was planning to go to Kansas City, where she would be staying for a little while. She asked him a great deal about the place and the surrounding countryside, and wistfully sighed how sad it was that she did not have someone like himself there to show her around. She would be so alone out there, she said, with just an elderly cousin to talk to. And so on, and so on.

It was only manipulation, Ezra thought. What happened between Wyatt and the girl was in the hands of Nature, not himself. It made no difference to him what happened—decisions of that sort were the responsibility of the parties who made them. All he had done was to ask the girl to go to Kansas City and to stay there for three weeks with Judah Harvey's wife. The woman was lonely, and would be glad of company from the East. He would pay all Sue Hawkes's expenses and a five-hundred-dollar bonus to boot. She accepted the opportunity with alacrity, and all Ezra had to do was to sit back and let nature take its course. It was not hard to feign surprise when Wyatt sought

him out and said that he had been talking over Ezra's offer.

"What offer was that?" Ezra said, frowning well.

"Working for the O.K.C. You said something about doubling my salary."

"I did?" Ezra said, still frowning. "But that was some time ago, Mr. Wyatt. I have other candidates in mind now."

"Oh," Wyatt said. He hadn't thought of that, obviously.

Ezra let him stew for a while. No point hooking a fish and then not playing him, he thought.

"I suppose I could. . . ."

"Yes?" Wyatt said eagerly.

"I don't think I could go as far as doubling your salary," Ezra said. "What are you getting now?"

Wyatt told him; it was a handsome figure.

"I'll give you twenty per cent on top of that," Ezra said. "And the same stock options."

"Twenty per cent on the stock options too, and you've got an engineer," Wyatt said, decisive as a knife.

"Done," Ezra said, and they shook hands. He did not let any of his satisfaction show. He would gladly have paid Wyatt any sum the engineer named if he had not had a handle on the man. That however, was then, and this was now.

"When do I start?" Wyatt asked.

"Almost immediately."

"From Kansas City?"

"From Shawnee, Mr. Wyatt. That's about—"

"I know where Shawnee is, Mr. Carver," Wyatt said. "And I'm your man."

"Why, Mr. Wyatt, I'm glad to hear it," Ezra said, with genuine pleasure. They shook hands again, and arranged to meet the following day to finalize the contract.

"One last question," Wyatt said.

"Yes?"

"Will there be accommodation at railhead for my wife?"

"Not really, Wyatt, it's no place for a woman."

"What I thought," Wyatt said. "I'll tell her tonight."

I'll bet you will, Ezra thought as he went to his study

to draft a contract for the engineer to sign on the morrow. Once you found out what people wanted, all you had to do was provide a means by which they could get it. If you controlled that means, you controlled them. It was that simple. He smiled, not so much triumphant as merely satisfied. He had his surveyor and he had his construction supervisor. They would still need manpower—and the money to pay for it—but at least the O.K.C. was beginning to become a reality. I must try to go and see Theo soon, he thought. We must resolve our differences, team up as in the good old days. He made a mental note to write to his brother as soon as he found the time, and smiled again, wryly this time. The one thing he could not buy with all his money was enough time.

There was so much to do, so much to learn, and so damned little time to spare. To discuss them sensibly—apart from making sure that he was not being sold a very cheap pig in a very expensive poke—Ezra had to assimilate a whole new lexicon of information about locomotives and rolling stock. It was not enough to tell an engineer that you needed something to pull a train. He would have a dozen questions that needed answering before the words were out of your mouth: what weight must she pull, what driving wheel arrangement would she need, what boiler capacity, what “plumbing” and so on, *ad infinitum*. There was only one way to get this kind of information, and that was to go where it was: to Garret & Eastwick, to William Swinburne in Paterson, New Jersey, and to all the New England locomotive builders: Wilmarth, Hinkley, Taunton, Manchester, and William Mason. Ezra saw them all and picked their brains without shame. He learned about drivers and boilers and stacks and fireboxes, about grasshoppers and camels and crabs and mud diggers. He became able to distinguish between the various designers, Campbell, Milholland or Zerah Colburn.

When he had obtained what he wryly referred to as a smattering of ignorance, Ezra went to see the giant of the locomotive industry, Baldwin of Philadelphia. Matthias Baldwin had started out as an apprentice silversmith in Philadelphia, drifted into making bookbinder’s tools with another man, and then begun making stationary steam

engines. He had built his first locomotive for the Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown Railroad in 1832, and although he had not lived to see it—he had died in 1866—his name was now synonymous with the very best in railroading equipment. The plant which he had founded in 1831 now covered nearly twenty acres of downtown Philadelphia.

Although technically the Baldwin company was now owned by (and even named after) Matthew Baird, and run by George Burnham and Charley Parry, two long-serving members of the original company, the firm was still known throughout America as “the Baldwin works.”

Plenty of people told Ezra to beware of Charlie Parry, the General Superintendent of the Baldwin works. Short tempered, they said; impatient with faint hearts, and possessed of a legendary sarcasm. Once he made a recommendation only a fool quarreled with it, and if he did, the fool was quickly told exactly how big a fool he was.

“Well, Mr. Carver,” Parry said. “And what can we do to help you?”

“Something very simple,” Ezra said. “I want you to build me the best locomotive you have ever built. I want it to be better than anything else presently in use on an American railroad. And I want it fast.”

“Is that all you want?” Parry said, cocking an eyebrow. He was a powerful, thickset man whose arms looked as if they had been forced into the sleeves of his jacket. Charlie Parry looked like a man who would have preferred dungarees and room to yell instead of a neat, serge suit and a padded chair in a boardroom.

“Yes,” Ezra said. “Yes, it’s all I want now. I will want to make even better ones as time goes by.”

“You know something about building locomotives then?”

“Not a damned thing,” Ezra said frankly.

“Then we’ll get along just fine,” Parry said, and his grin was warm and friendly. “You tell me what you want, and we’ll build her for you.”

Ezra told him what he wanted: a locomotive that would outhaul any other locomotive for her size and weight.

"You're asking for technical changes that no one has yet thought to put into locomotives, Mr. Carver," Parry pointed out. "That'll come expensive."

"I figure it is as costly to do it right as it is to do it wrong," Ezra said. "And it takes about the same amount of time."

"Mr. Carver," Parry said, grinning again. "I think I'm going to enjoy working with you."

"I'll be glad if you do," Ezra said. "But it won't make any difference if you don't. They tell me you're hard to work with. Well, so am I."

"Good," Parry said. "We'll get along fine."

And so they did. Ezra stayed in Philadelphia for two weeks working with Parry, and came away with the promise of a ten-wheeler that would do everything he wanted and probably more. Parry was designing it with double valves in each system chest. The locomotive would burn her own smoke, have a vacuum gauge on the front of the boiler, and be the first ever to have a driver brake on the wheels. Sixty-six-inch drivers, a boiler pressure of 130 pounds, a tender capable of carrying 2,800 gallons of water and 10,000 pounds of coal would give her the power, speed and range that Ezra knew she would need. He left Philadelphia well pleased, although not for one moment did he permit himself to believe that his good fortune was occasioned by either his personal charm or his business acumen. It was money: first and foremost and always, money. Like him or hate him, they knew he had the dollars.

His locomotive problems solved, Ezra now plunged into finding out about the latest developments in rolling stock and passenger carriages. There was Eaton & Gilbert's 45-footer, designed for the Hudson River Railroad, with its five compartments and eighteen-inch-wide corridor that he must see. There was George Pullman's sleeper—diner, first put into service in Canada two years earlier; Old Knight sleepers that had been in use prior to the war and might now be picked up cheaply. He had to pore over the competing designs of John Webster Wagner, the Gates company, Woodruff, Joy and Flowers. Although Ezra leaned strongly towards George Mortimer Pullman's 1859

design for the Chicago & Alton Railroad, it was still both necessary and advisable to inspect the designs of Col. W. D. Mann, who not only designed rolling stock but also somehow found time to be the publisher of the Mobile, Alabama, *Register*.

Then there were the flatcars, boxcars, cabooses, store cars, water cars and supply cars that would be needed to make up the work trains, and later carry freight: grain cars, cattle cars, baggage cars. There were names for different kinds of trains to remember, nicknames for all the different railroads, and a whole folklore of railroad stories. He could never hope to assimilate all of it, but he tried very hard to soak up as much as he could. A man never knew when a well-turned story or an offhandedly quoted fact would prove useful.

They were heady days for Ezra Carver, and he loved every moment of them. He felt strong, full of power, certain of his eventual success. It was as though everything he wanted to happen turned out as he wished. Money, he thought. It may not buy happiness, but it damned well buys everything else. He traded ruthlessly on the fact that cash money was tight. Most of the embryo railroads were trying to buy materials with their unproven stocks, but the surge of excitement at the news that the transcontinental line was completed had already faded. Investors questioned the need of another cross-country route, and indeed any other, with the result that railroad stocks had fallen rather than risen. Cash money still talked the most eloquently.

Ezra refrained from giving his suppliers any idea of how thinly he was stretched. He was paying Singer and the others, Wyatt, Harvey and the rest, out of his own pocket. Soon he would be paying construction crews and would badly need an extra infusion of money, but he let none of his worries show in his business dealings. His credit rating with Dun & Bradstreet was triple-A, the same in London. He always paid his debts on the nose, in cash. He owned nobody one red cent, and so now, when he was piling up debts he had no certainty of being able to settle, he did not feel it necessary to explain or justify his actions. His job was to get done what he wanted to do. So at this

time, if Ezra Carver abstained scrupulously from telling outright lies, he also abstained, and equally as scrupulously, from revealing the complete truth about his affairs.

Until Charley Parry finished building the new locomotive, Ezra needed some form of wheels. He bought an old coal-burner from the Niles Machine Works in Cincinnati. She had originally belonged to the Baltimore & Ohio—or "Beefsteak and Onions" as the railroad's passengers had dubbed it—and arranged for Niles to alter its wheels to fit his gauge. He ordered twelve flatcars from Barney & Smith of Dayton, and a used coach from the Gates company. They were rumored to be going under and seemed glad to get any money they could lay their hands on. Ezra placed firm orders for rails and spikes, frogs, switches, ties and chairs, all in the name of his Massachusetts corporation. Ten per cent cash on ordering, the balance to be paid on delivery. The total cost was a staggering \$700,000 but it would have to be paid—Singer had telegraphed from Kansas that Holiday's A.T.&S.F. had announced the commencement of construction, and the Kansas Pacific, halted for a while at Abilene by lack of funds, was again moving west. Its end-of-track was half a hundred miles across the plains from the boom town. If ever the time was ripe to start building the O.K.C., it was now. There was just one snag, and it was an enormous one.

The total amount of stock subscribed to date in the O.K.C. was still less than nine hundred thousand dollars. Under the unalterable terms of their charter, no start could be made until they had subscribed two million.

Ezra stared at the figures malevolently, hating them for standing in his way. Hen scratches, scrawls, accountant's sums that meant nothing! He had everything ready—the men, the machinery, the surveyed route, the promised support of the counties through which the railroad would first pass. He had spent almost his entire personal fortune putting the package together. He was committed to paying out another million dollars that he simply did not have. And now he was stopped cold by a law that prevented him from spending another hundred thousand dollars of his

own money and insisted that he get it from any other source save himself. He could not have that. He would not have it.

"Call a board meeting," he told Singer. "Have everyone here. Two weeks from today."

"Two weeks?" Singer said. "Not sure everyone will be able to get here at such short notice."

"Tell them to be here," Ezra said grimly. "Or tell them they can forget the railroad business entirely."

"My God!" Singer squeaked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Not yet," Ezra said. "Is Jay Cooke in town, do you know?"

"Imagine so," Singer said. "Saw him a couple of nights ago at Morrissey's place."

"Good," Ezra said, and said no more.

Assembled in the smoke-filled boardroom, with the sun slanting through the windows, Ezra Carver's fellow stockholders regarded him with trepidation as he got to his feet. Singer had already fussily told them that Ezra would be making an important statement regarding the future of the O.K.C. They awaited the worst with studied, if unconvincing, calm.

"Trouble, gentlemen," Ezra said, gauging the effect of his words carefully. "We are in bad trouble."

Their reactions were predictable: surprise, concealed unease, suppressed fear. They had been having a good ride at Ezra's expense and they knew it. Was it now all going to be taken away from them?

"He means the stocks," Singer put in hastily, only to be silenced by a withering look from Ezra.

"I mean the stocks," Ezra said. "You gentlemen well recall the terms under which this enterprise was chartered, of course? It was required to show a subscription of two million dollars' worth of its bonds prior to the commencement of construction. Well, here we are ready to begin, and what is our total figure? Tell them, Mr. President!"

Curtis Singer jumped visibly, shuffling the papers in front of him and clearing his throat self-importantly before speaking.

"It's ah, have it all here, one moment. Yes, here, it's eight hundred and eighty-four thousand dollars."

"Eight hundred and eighty-four thousand dollars," Ezra repeated scornfully. "Less than half of our requirements, one twentieth of our needs! Is that the best you can do, gentlemen?"

He felt a nagging pain in the upper part of his left arm. It had been bothering him for the past few weeks. He massaged it with his right hand as his colleagues looked at him in silence.

"Well?" he said. "No answers?"

"You know the answers as well as we do, Ezra!" Loysie Williams burst out. "Nobody wants our damned bonds! They can buy bonds in existing railroads, bonds that will show an immediate return on investment. If they want to get into newer businesses—and damned few do—there's the U.P. or the Kansas Pacific, or half a dozen others. There are at least two hundred prospected lines as speculative as ours—on paper, at least," he added hastily, seeing Ezra's face. "They're all offering stocks for sale, and they're all getting the same results as we are."

"Results?" Ezra thundered. "You have the gall to call these figures results? Don't you understand, we must have that subscription?"

"It can't be done, man!" Cornelius Roper said in his high voice. "Anyone will tell you it simply can't be done."

"It can," Ezra said.

They looked at him in amazement. If money was short—and it was—and nobody was buying railroad stocks—and they were not—then either Ezra Carver had finally gone mad or he was about to effect a miracle. He didn't look like a man who was mad. He looked like a man who knew exactly what he was doing.

"Gentlemen," Ezra said, "the entire remaining stock in the O.K.C. will be sold today. And you are going to be the buyers."

There was an outburst of protests at his statement. Roper and Williams jumped to their feet shouting, while Morton banged on the table and demanded to know what in the name of God Ezra Carver was talking about.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Curtis Singer shouted, trying for some semblance of order. "At least let us hear what Ezra has to say!"

"Well, I'll listen," Laurence James huffed. "I don't promise anything, but I'll listen."

"It had better be damned good!" Milton Waldman said. He pulled out his watch and looked at it ostentatiously. "I've come a long way, Ezra, and I'm in no mood for jokes."

"It's no joke, Milton," Ezra said. "I propose that you gentlemen will invest the capital required to fulfil the terms of our charter. No, wait, listen to me before you start again! To do what I suggest will only require you to pay ten per cent of the purchase price. That is approximately nine thousand three hundred dollars each."

"Nine thousand?" Mortimer shouted. "You want nine thousand? Man, I'd be hard put to pay nine hundred!"

"I know that," Ezra said. "I'll loan it to you."

He leaned back in his chair and relit his cigar, enjoying the stunned silence that had followed his words. They were all looking at him as if he had just announced the end of the world.

"What are you up to, Ezra?" Morgan said. "What scheme is hatching in that devious brain of yours now?"

"It's simplicity itself," Ezra said patiently. "I will loan you the money you need to make the down payments. I will take all the risk. If you want to take up the stock when it matures, you will simply pay me off and subscribe it in the normal fashion. If you do not, I will have the option to do what I like with the stock assuming your interest to be at an end."

"Good Lord," Singer said, his mouth open like a cod on a fishmonger's slab. "Good Lord!"

"I don't believe it," Roper said. "You're doing this for us?"

"I'm not doing it for you," Ezra said. "I'm doing it so we can get this goddamned railroad started! Wyatt and Harvey are out in Kansas waiting for word to begin. I have ordered the materials, the locomotive, the rolling stock we need. The only thing that stands between us and

commencement is the subscription of the stocks. It is illegal for me to subscribe it in my own name. So I propose to do so in yours!"

"It's incredible!" Mortimer said.

"Yes, but it's not illegal," Ezra said. "If that's what you mean. Maybe we're bending the rules a bit. But we're not breaking them."

"Can you do it, Ezra?" Waldman asked. "Have you got the cash?"

"I've got it," Ezra said. He did not tell them how he had got it.

"This is unbelievable," Williams said. "There has to be a catch in it somewhere."

"No catch," Ezra said, knowing that the only catch was his estimate of their inability to raise the money when the time came to pay the balance outstanding on their stocks. Well, that was their problem, not his.

"You'll do it then?" Mortimer said. "You'll fund us?"

"I'll do it," Ezra said.

"Can we have a show of hands, gentlemen?" Singer asked. Ezra watched them as they all looked at each other and then again at him. He said nothing. One by one their hands went up and Ezra smiled. They were smart men. They had all come immediately to the same conclusion, the one that he had expected. They didn't have a damned thing to lose by saying yes. If the road became a reality, they would stand to make a fortune. If it failed, they lost nothing; and there would even be a bonus. They would be home free while Ezra Carver lost every cent he possessed.

Lily-livered bastards, he thought, massaging his arm. If they really thought he was going to provide them with the means of becoming millionaires for nothing more than the effort of raising their right hands, they were in for a number of nasty shocks before someone shovelled dirt on to their coffins. It was not the O.K.C. which would make the millions, it was a small finance company in Worcester, Massachusetts. And none of them had one cent of stock in that.

"Carried unanimously," Singer said pompously. "I'll so enter it in the minutes."

"You'll do no such thing!" Roper blurted. "Let's, ah, how about keeping this, uh, a gentleman's agreement? What do you say, Ezra? I'm sure we all agree on that."

There was a general murmur of assent; and once again Ezra allowed himself a small, private smile. The reason Roper didn't want it on the record was as obvious as the man's venality. If the government ever audited the books, there would be no record through which he could be accused of conspiracy. Second, if the worst happened, he could deny that he had ever entered any agreement of any kind, with Ezra Carver or the man in the moon or anyone else.

The rest of the formalities took very little time. As treasurer and secretary, Ezra and Loysie Williams countersigned the stock certificates beneath the signature of the railroad's president, Curtis B. Singer. It was as florid and vain as the man himself. Hands were shaken, drinks poured, backs slapped. They agreed to send a telegraph message to Mike Wyatt at the Lindell Hotel in Kansas City telling him to start advertising for laborers.

"What about a groundbreaking ceremony?" Singer said, his mind on votes. "Surely we ought to go out to Kansas for the laying of the first rail? You, at least, Ezra!"

"No," Ezra said firmly. "If you feel the need of a ceremony, go ahead and arrange one, but I won't be a part of it. I've no time for such frivolities. We may still fail, gentlemen, and if we do we'd be well advised to let as few people know about it as possible. I'll celebrate the driving of the last spike if you like—but right now I'd rather keep it businesslike."

"That's good sense," Milton Waldman said. "I agree with Ezra."

There were sober nods, and finally it was agreed not to make anything out of the event. Half an hour later the meeting was adjourned, and they clattered noisily out of the office and down the stairs, leaving Ezra alone in the untidy room. After a few minutes he went across to the window and opened it wide to let out the cigar smoke. The late afternoon sun was still strong, and the sounds and stink of the street surged in. Someone was selling roast chestnuts; their aroma was particularly pungent. Ezra

sighed and sat in one of the empty chairs, swinging his feet up on to the table. Unconsciously, he massaged his left arm; the pain there nagged away like toothache and he wondered whether he ought to call in and see Webber. The trouble was time. He hadn't time to be ill and see his doctor. Every moment of the day seemed spoken for weeks in advance.

"Three million dollars," he said.

The others didn't know what he had done, of course. They had assumed that he had the money, and Ezra let them assume it. Even Sam Ward didn't know how close to the wind Ezra was sailing. There had only been one way to raise the money, and that was by borrowing most of it. It was a fairly calculated risk. Once the qualifying forty miles of the O.K.C. had been built the railroad would become a license to print money. Ezra's little Massachusetts corporation could—and—would—charge the railroad whatever it liked for its services, taking payment in either cash or railroad stocks. The latter would become progressively more valuable as more track was laid, so in effect Ezra would be making himself rich by building the railroad that was making him rich. And the more of it he built, the richer it would make him. For that kind of prize it was worth putting everything on the line, and that was what he had done. Without a qualm he had signed his personal note in Jay Cooke's beautiful, walnut-panelled office, and done it with a flourish. It wasn't every day a man borrowed two and a half million dollars.

The rest of the money he thought he could probably raise himself. As Cooke had once said to him, all the money wasn't in the banks. He had learned a few tricks over the years. How to raise money by using one's own securities as collateral, even if those securities might be worth less than half of the sum borrowed if sold at their true worth. How to raise more on government bonds which were selling slowly. And more by borrowing money when you worked out that interest rates were going to make one of their periodic upward jumps, and then loaning out that money at the higher rates. For that kind of game, however, you needed time, and right now time was the one

thing Ezra did not have. Sam Ward's "suspense fund"—the account in the Washington bank out of which Sam "fed the pigs"—needed replenishing. There were a lot of fat politicians furnishing town houses or keeping mistresses on Ezra Carver's money, but Ezra knew better than to drop them. He needed them just as he needed his fellow stockholders. Later on would be another matter entirely.

Even so, the strain of presenting a smiling face and a pose of imperturbable confidence when he knew that he was over two million dollars in debt was not easy to bear. Ezra knew that if he defaulted on one interest payment Jay Cooke would foreclose faster than you could say his name. Maybe I am getting old at that, he thought. For some reason, the thought brought Jenny Bruce's face into his mind, and he decided to call and see her. She was rehearsing a new play which was being presented by a rising new theatrical producer named Augustin Daly. A comedy of manners in the French style, she said. Ezra was sure that it would be a perfect bore and stayed away from the rehearsals. Not that he was given much option: Daly was a stern disciplinarian, with a stringently enforced set of rules and regulations that his company must observe. They were not allowed to leave the city, whether in the play or not; not allowed those intimate meetings in the green room so beloved of the profession; nor encouraged to invite gentlemen callers to the dressing-rooms. Ezra was appalled by all this when Jenny told him about it.

"But it's tyranny!" he exclaimed. "The man is nothing but a puffed-up little Nero!"

"No, Ezra," she said, smiling. "It's really quite good sense. It keeps the wolves from the door."

"Hmph!" Ezra said. One of his pet hates was the legion of young men who flocked around the stage door after the evening performance, hoping to catch a glimpse of Jenny. They sent her flowers, and invitations to dine. Their notes were sometimes startlingly direct, at others sickeningly maudlin. Jenny was never less than gracious, never more than polite to any of them, but Ezra could not bear them. Their smooth young faces, so full of hope and lust, made him angry. He hated them for their youth, loathed them for wanting her. If he could have put a sign on her saying

she was his, he would have done it. If he could have put a sign on her saying she was his, he would not have given a damn for her.

"I don't like Daly," he said. "Too pushy by far."

"Oh, Ezra!" Jenny said, the laughter spilling out of her like a peal of silver bells. "Sometimes you really are incredible!"

"What do you mean?" he said, smiling, ready to be amused.

"Well," she said, "it's such effrontery!"

"Effrontery?" he said. "What do you mean, effrontery?" His good humor had vanished, but Jenny either did not notice or did not care. She told him that his calling Daly pushy was the worst case of the pot calling the kettle black that she had come across in many a long day.

"You're saying I am pushy?"

"Of course you are, Ezra," she said.

"Well," he growled, "it's never seemed to bother you before."

"Oh, darling," she said, "I didn't say it bothered me."

"Don't call me 'darling'," he snapped. "Your theatrical friends have made the word meaningless."

"Ezra," she said, concerned now. "What is it, dar—what's wrong?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing's wrong. Nothing's ever wrong with us pushy people. We've got skins like elephants."

"Oh, Ezra," she sighed, "I'm sorry."

"No need to be," he said.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," Jenny said, touching his hand with gentle fingers, then wincing as he snatched his hand away. "Don't . . . don't let's quarrel."

"I'm not quarrelling," he said.

"Argue, then. Let's not even argue. It's such a long time since we had an evening together."

"Perhaps I should have been a bit more pushy," he said. "Like your friend Daly."

"Ezra!" Jenny said, her own anger rising now. "Why are you trying to fight with me? What have I done?"

"Nothing," he said, angry without the slightest cause, without the remotest idea why he was angry. *Hurt her,*

something inside him said, *hurt her*. "That's what you're good at doing: nothing."

"I think I can do without this," Jenny said, getting to her feet. Her face was white and tense. "I think we had better just stop now."

"Yes," he said. "Maybe you're right at that."

There was a lot more being said than just the words. When she looked at Ezra she saw it in his eyes. Sadness changed her expression, a disappointment that made Ezra seek to conceal his contrition beneath greater anger.

"I'm going," he said. "Don't expect to see me for a while."

"Ezra, please," Jenny said. "Don't go like this."

"Why?" he said. "Am I being too pushy?"

"Oh, go, then, and damn you!" she shouted, almost shoving him out of the house. She slammed the door of the brownstone with a bang that made heads turn on the street. Ezra went down the steps and turned towards Fifth Avenue, thoughts seething in his head like worms in a can. What's happened to me? he wondered. What's happened to her? We used to talk about everything. Now it's always arguments, every time we meet it ends in an argument.

He remembered how he would hurry downtown to see her, almost on fire to touch her, to slide naked beneath the fluffy eiderdown and feel the lithe, sinuous strengths of her body. That wasn't the same any more, either. It was his own fault, he knew, not hers. Jenny was just as lovely—perhaps, now that she was that few years older, even lovelier—and had hardly changed. It was he who had lately avoided the bedroom, fearing that he would find his body indifferent to hers. Do I love her at all? he wondered. Did I ever love her? And if I should leave her, what then? He saw a picture of her making love to someone else, and felt a surge of anger at the phantom. No, he said, not that. Jenny was a beautiful woman, and she had many admirers. Men were caught up by her gaiety and spirit, but he knew that she was not promiscuous and never could be.

He had not seen her for a week. She was too busy with her rehearsals, he with his financial problems. He resolved to make it up to her this time. If only I wasn't so damned

tired all the time, he thought, massaging the top of his left arm. The ache was still there; I ought to see Webber, he thought. Maybe tomorrow or the day after.

He got up and closed the window, and then walked into the outer office. He stood for a long time, silent, staring at the big map of the United States, the undulating diagonal marking the proposed route of the Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad.

"You won't beat me," he said softly—to the map, to the red line on it, to the very continent it spanned. "You won't." It was as if the railroad itself had become a physical opponent to be bested. The money was almost a by-product of that contest, the eventual prize, but more important than any prize was winning. Doing it. Showing them he could do it.

He went out of the office and locked the doors behind him, then went down to the street. He stopped off at the telegraph office to send word to Mike Wyatt in Kansas City that work could commence as soon as the necessary manpower was recruited. He added the words "good luck" out of habit, then crossed them off. He would make his own luck, he thought; he always had.

Sarah Conway awoke in hell.

The room was bathed in a wicked red glare, and smoke billowed everywhere, bringing her coughing and retching out of bed. *Fire!* The word was like a bright red explosion in her mind, snapping her instantly wide awake, as though someone had thrown a bucket of cold water over her. *The house is on fire!* she thought, and then she thought *Oh my God, Katie!* She could not see the walls of the room or the door, so thick was the smoke. She could hear a long, roaring sound like continuous thunder, and through it the strident clanging of bells. Sarah collided with the wall, her whole body heaving with racking coughs. She groped her way along the wall and her seeking hand found the door knob, pulling the door back. With a rushing sound, leaping tongues of flame darted in at her, searing the thin cotton of her nightgown. Through the triumphant crackle of the marching flames she could hear the thin screams of the baby. Sarah's mind went completely blank. She thought nothing, felt nothing as she staggered barefoot along the blazing landing. Katie, Katie, that was all that was in her mind, the word Katie. The floorboards were hot, smoking from the fire flickering beneath them, but her bare feet felt no pain. It was as if a shutter had been let down in her mind, closing out sensation. She heard the fizz of her hair singeing as she groped her way along the narrow hall, choking and coughing in the thick, rolling smoke, her eyes blinded by dirty tears that streaked her

sooty face. She followed the sound of her child's voice into the burning room. The curtains were smoldering, and long, thin, flickering fingers of flame were darting up the window frames like snake tongues. Sarah's foot banged against something firm and unmoving. Groping in the reddened darkness with hands that were already covered in blisters, Sarah realized that it was the body of the nurse, Alice.

Now she had Katie in her arms, sobbing. She stumbled back towards where she thought the door was. She could see nothing and her head was spinning; the heat was intense, suffocating her. It was as if she was inhaling flame. She felt a sharp pain in her knees, and realized she had fallen, the screaming baby clutched hard against her breasts. The fall was a blessing, for there was still some air near the floor. Sarah gulped at it hungrily, worming across the melting linoleum towards the rectangle of brighter color that must be the doorway into the hall. Her night-dress was smoldering. She beat out the sparks with her bare hands, kissing Katie and sobbing, "All right, baby, it's all right, baby, it's all right, it's all right."

When she got out on to the landing she realized that the stairway was already starting to burn. Tongues of flame were jumping up the stairwell in irregular bursts and there was thick smoke everywhere. Large black fragments of burned paper and cloth drifted on the eddies and the flames swayed backwards and forward like dancers. There was no other way down. Sarah lurched to the top of the stairs, peering down into the red-black murk to see if the staircase was still intact. Close to the wall, she thought, stay close to the wall, the stairs are stronger close to the wall. She felt for the first stair with her bare foot, and then the next, moving slowly down through the flickering fire that ebbed and then surged forward, as if reaching for her. The building felt as if it was shaking, but she thought that perhaps it was just her own body. She had no conception of the passage of time. The world had come to a stop, and nothing mattered but the next stair down and then the one after that and the one after that. Long fingers of fire licked hungrily at the banister, and the linoleum was already burning, smoking furiously. It seared the soles of Sarah's already burned feet as she felt her way down-

wards. It was like descending into an inferno. She could hear a high-pitched keening sound somewhere; she did not know that it was she who was making it.

The hall was impassable, the front door a glowing red mass of solid flame and smoke. The heat beat Sarah back, and she stumbled again and fell into the scullery. The quarry-tiled floor was shockingly cool, and the stone walls were resisting the heat, although the woodwork was already smoldering. There was an old quilt hanging by the clothesline, and Sarah snatched it up, wrapping it around herself and the baby. She opened the door leading into the back yard and as she did so there was a huge roar, an almost animal sound. Great leaping tongues of flame came thundering through the scullery as if in pursuit of her. The draft created by opening the door had sucked the fire into the room at the speed of a galloping horse, and its blast blew Sarah backwards like a leaf. She lay panting on the ground in the yard, looking up to see that the sky was blood red. The unearthly light revealed that the entire street was ablaze.

Now she heard a strange, distant, moaning sound, somewhere between the sounds of a gale and thunder. The driving wind was snatching the leaping goutts of fire sideways. When the wind momentarily subsided, the flames leaped even higher, crackling, hissing, thundering. The air was full of flying ash and grit, the wind whirled dust and smoke.

Shoes, Sarah thought. She got up from the ground and went towards the house. The heat was astonishing, beating at her like a club. Her face, her hands, her entire body felt as though the skin was brittle, stretched tight. The baby was screaming with terror.

"There, there, darling," she said, picking Katie up. She ran out of the yard and into Monroe Street. The sight that met her eyes was unbelievable, impossible, unearthly. It looked as if someone had set the world on fire. There was a wall of flame twice as high as the highest buildings at the eastern end of Monroe Street, raging, leaping, deafening, irresistible flame that advanced visibly as she watched it. Chicago was on fire: the whole city was in flames.

People were staggering towards her like ghosts, faces black, hair singed off, clothes burned. They were carrying

suitcases and boxes in their arms, bags, wooden crates full of such pitiful possessions as they had been able to rescue from the flames. Many carried babies and children, wide-eyed with fright. One man had a big tabby cat cradled in his arms; its fur was burned and its eyes were wild with terror. Although the screaming wind was as hot as the breath of Hades, tugging at the thin dressing-gown and yanking at the bedraggled quilt she had wrapped around herself, Sarah shivered with cold. People went by her on either side like ghosts. No one spoke to her, no one looked at her. Then a big man came by and stopped. He peeled off his overcoat and put it around her and the baby.

"Keep the wind off yez, missus," he said. He had an Irish accent. He was gone before Sarah could speak. She wrapped Katie in the quilt and then put the coat around both of them. The baby was whimpering now, not terrified any more.

The fire was only a couple of blocks away. Sarah could see the black shapes of hurrying human figures limned against the red glare, like flies on the face of the sun. She began to walk west, following the crowds. A few of them moaned, but most of them were silent, shuffling along the sidewalks like the captives of Indians. Down La Salle Street to the south the flames were very close, roaring like cannon. The wind shrieked and dust and smoke whistled furiously around the crawling crowd. A woman hurried past Sarah carrying a kettle in one hand, a cooking pot in the other.

"Hurry!" she was shouting, "hurry up!"

Down La Salle Street a woman was pushing a baby-carriage, her head down, shoulders hunched. Sarah could see her clearly, outlined against the red light of the advancing fire like a silhouette in a frame. She saw the flames lean down, almost negligently; the woman and the baby-carriage were sucked like a leaf into the gaping maw of the fire.

To the south and west the entire city was aflame, a vast ocean of fire that swept in billows and waves, pursuing the fugitive population at the speed of a walking man, relentless, unstoppable. Buildings disappeared in moments, literally melting in the astonishing heat generated by the fire. Behind the crowds, pouring in from the side streets

they had just traversed, the flames burst out, impelled as if by some gigantic blowpipe. Everything they touched burst instantly into flame, collapsing immediately. Someone touched Sarah's arm. She turned to see a woman, long hair loose, eyes vacant.

"Everything is gone," the woman said, almost forgivingly.

Then for the first time Sarah thought, *My God, Kieron!* Behind her the fire roared like a volcano. The ground trembled and the air was full of flying brands of flame. At the corner of Clark Street a policeman was shouting at the crowds. Surrounded by people waving their arms and calling for help, he ignored everyone.

"Head south!" he was shouting. "Head south! The fire is going north—head south!"

People tugged at his arms, plucked at his uniform, and still he kept shouting. The crowds moaned and shrieked and yelled with excitement and fear and hate, drowning the policeman's voice. He kept yelling at the people to go south; the fire was moving north, the firemen could not stop it.

Sarah shouldered her way through the immobile mob, trying to get near enough to the policeman to ask him whether the fire had reached the Tremont House. She was buffeted by men and women clawing their way through the mob, carried relentlessly back down Clark Street by the sheer solid press of the crowd. Screaming at them to give her room, kicking and elbowing like a fury to make room for her baby, she might have been fighting indifferent stone. Nobody took any notice of her. They might all have been automatons, faces blank and black, strange creatures with only faint resemblance to men and women. Burning debris rained down from the sky on their heads. The men cursed and slapped at the glowing fragments. Some women were kneeling at the corner of Adams Street, praying aloud, their voices like the sound of tearing tin. The lurching crowd eddied around them like water around rocks. Kieron, Sarah thought distractedly. Would he have tried to reach home, tried to get to her in the house on Monroe Street? She fought helplessly against the heaving rush of the crowd until she was able to get to the inside of the sidewalk and then half-fell, panting with exertion

and pain, into a shop doorway. When there was a gap in the pushing throng she set out again, using her body and her knees and her feet and her elbows, oblivious to the sullen curses and yelps of the people she shoved aside. The same big policeman, his red face streaked with sweat, was still yelling hoarsely at the people. They looked exactly the same as the people whom Sarah had fought her way through on this corner half an hour earlier. Their eyes were as vacant, their movements as slow, their faces as featureless as creatures from another planet.

"Go south!" the policeman was shouting. "Head south!"

"Officer!" Sarah screeched. "Officer!"

The effort hurt her throat. It was as if the skin inside her throat was stretched and dried. The policeman didn't seem to hear her, although it was hardly surprising. The roar of the fire was even louder now. Looking down Monroe Street Sarah saw that the giant pillars of flame were already past Clark Street and almost upon Dearborn. Shoving and kicking, putting her back against the milling horde, Sarah got nearer to the policeman.

"Get outa here, missis!" he shouted. "Get that kid outa here!"

"The Tremont House!" Sarah screamed. "Is it still standing?"

"The what?" he yelled. "The what?"

"The Tremont House!" Sarah shouted back. "Is it burned?"

"Jesus, lady, I don't know!" The policeman shook his head, as if afraid the whole world had gone insane. "Will you get out of here, now? Head south! Head south!"

Sarah shook her head doggedly. She pushed against the crowd and the policeman shouted something after her. She thought he shouted, "You can't go up there!" but it wouldn't have made any difference what he said. The Tremont House was at Lake and Dearborn and unless the fire stopped her that was where she was going. She worked her way through the stumbling, shouting mass of fleeing men and women on the corner of Dearborn and Madison. The fire was already nearly at the north-south street, so she stayed on the eastern sidewalk, moving faster now. There were not so many people up there. They were all heading south, away from the fire. Three blocks further up

the street she could see the darker bulk of the hotel. The upper floors were on fire; she could see flames shooting out of the blackened window apertures. She heard women screaming as she drew nearer to the burning building. The baby clutched to her breast had stopped whimpering and gone to sleep, her little face smeared with soot from the flying sparks. There was pandemonium outside the hotel, and worse inside. The elevator had jammed and the top floors were already cut off by the flames.

Men were shouting and fighting their way through the mob, flailing weaker women and smaller men aside with their fists, knees, anything. Women swarmed in the parlors of the hotel, blank-faced with shock, half dressed, some badly burned. Invalids, brought to the hotel for safety, were lying on the floor. Others were sitting, sobbing hopelessly, watched by pale-faced men with expressions of helpless apathy on their faces. Why don't they *do* something? Sarah thought vexedly. She hurried from room to room, trying to find Kieron. There was no sign of him anywhere. She vaguely registered the fact that some of the women were staring at her as she pushed past them, but she did not care about that. Her blackened face and *déshabillé* were nothing like as offensive as their bovine helplessness. Let them stare. At least she was doing something, Sarah thought, not just sitting and whining.

After about twenty minutes some firemen came into the lobby of the hotel and told everyone to get out. The flames were advancing at an enormous speed, they said, and were already halfway down the block between Clark and Dearborn Streets. The women began screaming and moaning again, and for a moment there was panic. It was quelled when the four firemen shouted at them to be quiet, and moved into the parlors to kick the men on to their feet and get them to lead the women out into the street.

"Come on lady!" one of the firemen told Sarah gruffly. "Get that kid out of here!"

"My husband!" Sarah said, resisting his push angrily. "He's in here somewhere!"

"If he's down here, he'll come out into the street same as everyone else," the fireman said, pushing her again,

gently this time but more insistently. "If he's anywhere else, he's dead."

"What?" Sarah said. "What did you say?"

"How's that, lady?" the man said.

"Listen to me—" Sarah began, but the man waved her away. Drunk, Sarah thought, he's probably drunk. Someone ought to report him. She felt suddenly light-headed. She went into the parlor opposite the registration desk, her legs weak. The soles of her feet were numb, and the right side of her face felt as if the fire was still licking at it. As she went into the parlor she caught sight of a weird apparition across the room. It was like some obscene caricature of a woman, dressed in burning rags stolen from a garbage can, bundled under a huge Melton serge overcoat which had great holes burned in it. The woman's hair was a short, blackened frizz like that of a minstrel-show performer, and she had neither eyebrows nor eyelashes. Her hands and legs were black and pitted by spark burns, her eyes glaring and red.

"Oh my God!" Sarah said. The shambling thing she had seen was her own reflection in a huge pier-glass on the parlor wall. Clutching baby Katie close to her breast, she ran mindless into the seething street, terrified for the first time.

The fire had started, they said, in a cow-barn belonging to Patrick O'Leary, on the corner of De Koven and Jefferson Streets, a block north of 12th. Before any fire engine could reach the scene, it had spread like lightning through the tinder-dry wooden buildings adjoining the barn, and in less than ten minutes two blocks were afire. The fire department, already exhausted by its efforts to quench the fire that had destroyed four city blocks the day before, could no more stop the march of the flames than Canute could turn the tide. By 10:30 p.m., an hour after it had begun, the fire dominated the area between Jefferson Street and the south branch of the Chicago River, fanned and encouraged by a south-westerly wind of almost hurricane proportions.

Huge chunks of burning debris were borne ahead of the flames by the wind, starting fresh fires at Adams Street and

across into the city proper. By midnight the flames were demolishing what was left of the ruined blocks burned the previous night, and an hour later marching across Monroe Street to the north and Franklin to the west. The fire was moving now at a speed faster than a man could walk. A lurid mass of flames pumped Monroe Street, moving north, eating up Farwell's stables and the American Merchant's Union Express, where it killed ninety-four fine horses.

At four o'clock in the morning the fire was out of control, extending from Harrison Street northward to the main branch of the river, a distance of nearly a mile. It had reached Dearborn Street on the east, destroying as it did the Michigan Railroad depot, the Ogden House, the Bigelow House, both of the Honoré blocks, Lombard and Reynolds's blocks, Farewell Hall, all the beautiful seven-story marble buildings on La Salle Street, the Chamber of Commerce, the Court House, Sherman House, Briggs House, Tremont House, Crosby's Opera House, Wood's Museum, Hooley's Opera House and the Dearborn Theater where Kieron and Sarah had been playing in *Mimi*. The offices of the Chicago newspapers—*Mail*, *Post*, *Times*, *Republican* and *Journal*—were destroyed, the *Tribune* building surviving as a shell. At seven in the morning, when it was believed that the fire might now die of its own inanition, a fantastic whirlpool of wind gusted along Dearborn Street and fanned the glowing embers into fresh life.

In a moment the fire was sweeping once more to the north and south, and everything that had been left untouched between Jackson and Madison, everything to the very shores of Lake Michigan itself, was destroyed. Then the fickle wind lulled, allowing the fire to work south and further south.

As the fire spread up Wabash Avenue wild scenes of panic ensued. The street was crowded with vehicles of all sorts, many drawn by men because it was impossible to find animals. People jammed the sidewalks, carrying clothing, furniture, possessions of every shape and size. Women dressed in elegant clothes, in furs, evening gowns, jewels, walked behind poor women with mattresses on their heads, or staggering under the weight of precious pieces of furniture. Many women had bundles of clothing in their

arms. The men dragging the wagons wore green veils over their eyes to protect them from the eddying, blinding dust. Drunks staggered about, enjoying the end of the world.

Truckmen and express drivers banged on the doors of houses, offering their services at a hundred dollars a load. There were many fights, and some looting. Firemen came upon a boy who was in the act of igniting a clothesline saturated with coal-oil prior to throwing it into a building on 32nd Street. One of the firemen killed him with an axe. Two men trying to set fire to the Jesuit church on the West Side were summarily lynched. A man was discovered in the basement of a house on Fourth Avenue armed with hay and matches. The crowd dragged him out and stoned him to death. His body lay in the street for two days.

By three o'clock on the morning of Monday the fire was moving towards the north side of the river. By day-break it was at the Rush Street bridge, which was crowded with people. The bridge was turned to prevent the fire crossing the river, and everyone on it was killed instantly. The fire marched across the river anyway, feasting upon the frame buildings and the industrial premises bordering it. The lumber yards were the next to go, and then the waterworks. People living in the area fled towards the lake, and soon found themselves between two deaths: freezing lake or searing fire.

The flames missed nothing: wooden houses, commercial premises, the mansions of the wealthy or the rookeries of the poor, even markers in the cemetery were swallowed in the fire before, finally, the lake itself confined the marching blaze. It was not until the late evening of Tuesday, October 10, 1871 that Chicago began to breathe again and, as the fire finally died, to count the cost of the disaster.

An area four miles in length, averaging about two-thirds of a mile in width, and comprising almost 1,700 acres had been destroyed. On average, the fire had burned sixty-five acres an hour, destroying property at the rate of \$125,000 a minute. The total loss of city property was estimated at \$2,680,856. 5,000 water service pipes had literally melted, together with 370 water meters. Bridges and viaducts were burned that would cost \$203,310 to replace. Damage to the sewerage works was estimated at \$42,000. 2,162 lamps and lamp-posts were more or less damaged

by the fire: another \$33,000. The fire had raged over the wooden block pavement for a distance of twenty-eight and a half miles, causing a further \$211,350 worth of damage. It also destroyed the wooden sidewalks along streets and roads for a total length of 121¾ miles.

The total loss of property could only be estimated: two hundred million dollars, they were saying. They could well have been saying ten times that, for statistics could not begin to describe the human misery that the holocaust had occasioned. There were more than a hundred thousand people homeless and on the streets, sleeping in chapels and churches and empty schools. Two hundred and fifty bodies had been recovered, but no one knew how many more had perished, how many vagrants incinerated in flophouses and rookeries, how many travellers and visitors in boarding houses and hotels, how many strangers vanished in the roaring maw of the fire.

They found Kieron Conway's body with that of his mistress, Blanche Treadwell, in the smoking ruins of a small house on Lake Street. Sarah identified her husband's partially melted watch and the knob of his cane at the City Morgue. The police asked her to look at the bodies, but she would not, and they did not persist. They knew who she was, and they had heard what had happened to her: Sarah Conway's voice had been burned out of her throat. The doctors in the makeshift hospitals on the south side had done what little they could for her, but it was not much. They told her that it was possible that in time she would regain the full use of her vocal chords, and they spoke of new techniques being perfected in Germany which might repair the damage, but. . . . And then they shrugged their shoulders. In rescuing her baby Sarah had inhaled flame. She was not stricken dumb, but her voice was hardly more than a croak, a sad, sad travesty of the ringing sound which had thrilled thousands. Sarah nodded and accepted; the doctors who spoke of operations in Germany might have been recommending a trip to the moon. Sarah had learned the extent of her future, and knew that even if she wanted to she could not afford the journey to Europe, the private clinics, the expensive operations which might, and only *might*, restore her voice to some semblance of its original beauty. Kieron had died, as he had lived, without

thought of the morrow. There was something like seven hundred dollars in the bank. She sold all the beautiful theatrical costumes she had once taken such pride in owning. They were the trappings of a beautiful actress named Sarah Conway, not the drab woman who accepted the greasy dollar bills and the hand-hot silver coins for them. This woman would never act in a theater again. No audience would ever pay to hear her croak the lines of Shakespeare, cackle instead of laugh, crow instead of sing.

To be sure, Sarah could have gone to Kieron's theatrical friends. Daly, Wallack, even Tony Pastor would have helped her, as would all of Kieron's old acquaintances in New York. For a while, she thought, for a while. They would be kind and understanding, but not for ever, and although she longed with all her heart for support, she knew that to ask it now would be to have to beg it later. She would not do that; she would never beg.

There was nowhere to go. Her own parents were long since dead. The Drakes had lost Harmony Farm during the war between the states; it had been burned to the ground. She had no idea where any of them were living now. Her only relative was a sister, Dora, with whom she had fitfully corresponded over the years. Dora had married an Ohio farmer, and they had moved to the new Territory of Kansas. No other choice seemed possible, so Sarah wrote to her sister and asked her if she could go and stay there for a while. It would not be permanent, she said. Just until she got on her feet. She was strong; she could work on a farm. She would be glad to be out in the country where no one would know who she was—who she had been. She would find work, she told Dora, she had to: she had a growing baby to feed.

A month later Dora's letter arrived, bidding her to go on down to Kansas. If it was not bubbling with enthusiasm, it was not discouraging, either. Dora's husband had bought a store, the letter said, and Dora was sure that they could find something for Sarah to do. Sarah went to the public library and tried to find the place in an atlas, but she was unable to do so. There was no town on the map of Kansas called Wichita.

BOOK THREE

1872-1873

Wichita lay sprawled athwart the Arkansas River, on undulating prairie segmented by a dozen creeks with names like Cowskin, Clearwater, Ninnescah, Wildcat, Gypsum and Chisholm. Everywhere the eye moved there were cattle; nearly a hundred thousand of them, McCoy said, as proud as if he had personally herded every single one of the brutes up the Chisholm Trail from Texas. They were ugly, ungainly beasts; Texas longhorns. They reminded Ezra of the young steers he had seen *toreros* fighting with cape and sword in Central America, except that these animals carried horns fully twice and sometimes three times as long as the *toros bravos* of the Mexican bullrings.

Wichita was booming, and McCoy its most ardent promoter. He met Ezra at the railroad depot, and shook hands with all the false bonhomie of a fraudulent bond salesman.

"Delighted to see you here, Mr. Carver!" he said, beaming, smiling, nodding, shaking away at Ezra's hand. "*Absolutely delighted!* We've got so much to show you, sir, so much to show you!"

The damned man's brought a delegation, Ezra thought vexedly, as McCoy introduced him to the town's mayor, James Hope. You'd think he'd never heard of Abilene.

"Jim's a partner in a wholesale wine and liquor business right here in town," McCoy said, as Ezra and Hope shook hands. He then introduced a hulking giant of a man named Greiffenstein who spoke with a thick German accent, and

a neat dandy of a fellow called Mead. Ezra gathered that Mead was Greiffenstein's partner in various businesses.

"Got ourselves quite a little town here, Mr. Carver," McCoy said, as though he had built the place with his own hands. "Now you've given us a railroad, we're really going to grow!"

"What the devil is that awful stench?" Ezra said.

It was pointless not to mention it; the stink was palpable, almost a physical presence. McCoy jerked a thumb towards the north.

"Bones," he explained. "Buffalo bones. And hides. You kind of forget they're there, after a while."

"You can forget that stink?" Ezra asked.

"You don't so much forget it as forget to remember it," Mead said, with a smile as neat and contained as himself.

"That's the smell of money, also," Greiffenstein said. "One hundred buffalo skeletons make one ton fertilizer. One prime buffalo hide is vert three dollars. Some men out on the prairie are bringing in a hundred fifty hides a day. That's big money, Mr. Carver."

"And revenue for you, sir," McCoy said. "Every pound of bones, every hide shipped, that's revenue for the O.K.C.!"

"Revenue it may well be," Ezra said. "It stinks none the less for that. Let's get on."

McCoy smiled a shade anxiously, and flicked the whip over the haunches of the tired nags pulling the wagon. They set off down a bumpy track that was hardly more than a scar on the surface of the prairie. It ran parallel to the glistening railroad tracks, straight as an arrow towards the huddle of the town up ahead. A climbing pillar of dust rose behind them, sifting audibly back to earth as they clattered towards the stockyards.

"Fifteen sub-divisions, Mr. Carver," McCoy was saying, waving a grandiloquent arm. "Nothing but the very best. Twenty-seven gates, sir, four runways and chutes. We can fill one hundred and twenty-five carloads a day, and we're doing so, seven days a week. Nearly a thousand carloads a week, sir. That's revenue for you too!"

"How do the cattle get here?" Ezra wanted to know.

"They cross the Arkansas west of town," Mead said. "They're driven through town and then down here."

"Through the town? Why?"

"I built a toll bridge over the river," Greiffenstein said. "That's plenty easier than having to swim the cattle across. Most of the cowboys want to take a drink in Delano, anyway."

"Expensive business, building bridges," Ezra remarked.

"Twenty-seven thousand, a couple hundert extra," Greiffenstein replied proudly.

"And what is Delano?"

"That's the rid-light district," Greiffenstein said, "vest of town."

If Hope's look could have killed him, the big man would have dropped dead at Ezra's feet. "Place is outside the city limits," Hope interposed hastily. "Not a damned thing we can do about it."

Ezra nodded. He didn't give a damn about the red-light district. Cowboys were cowboys and railroad men were railroad men. Saturday night they wanted a drink and a bath and a woman. Places like Delano offered them all three, separately or simultaneously. He looked at Greiffenstein with more respect. There would be more than a hundred thousand longhorns coming into Wichita during the season now beginning. If all of them had to pay a toll to cross the German's bridge, their passage would make Greiffenstein well off in his first year and wealthy after two or three. His English might not be perfect, but there was nothing wrong with his mathematics.

"We have the makings of a fine little town here, Mr. Carver," Mead said. "We are already registered as a city of the second class."

"Absolutely, absolutely," said the mayor, Hope. He was a short, stockily built man with a straggly beard and deep-set eyes. His face had that sad, forgiving expression often worn by experienced bartenders. "Substantial citizens on our city and school boards. No firearms permitted within the city limits. Sabbath strictly observed. Ordinances stringently enforced."

"Baptists just formed a church here," Greiffenstein added.

"And we've just finished a new Masonic Hall," said Mead.

"First National Bank opened up a branch," McCoy said. "The building cost nineteen thousand dollars."

They clearly expected Ezra to be impressed by all these facts and figures, and he put the appropriate expression on his face. Not for the first time he wondered what act of faith moved men like these to pick a spot in the middle of nowhere, to erect a huddle of squalid shacks on it, and then proceed to convince themselves that one day it would rival San Francisco, even if it was a little rough right now. McCoy guided the wagon around a ten-foot hole in the trail and turned the conveyance towards the north-west.

"Buffalo wallow," he explained.

"We'll be there soon," Hope said. "You'll like Wichita."

Ezra had serious reservations about that, but he let none of them show. You'd think they were trying to sell me the place, he thought. Yet if anyone could take the credit for putting Wichita on the map, it wasn't those three-small-town businessmen in their dusty serge suits and derby hats. It was himself.

He had seen the town's potential almost from the day it was plotted in 1870, when it was just a dozen log huts with a prairie-dog town in the middle of its single, sage-pocked street. If Wyatt swung the O.K.C. rails a few miles south, Ezra could with one stroke destroy the dominance of the Kansas Pacific and Holliday's A.T.&S.F. as shippers of beef. The Texas drovers didn't give a hoot in hell whose railroad they put the cattle on. If the prices were right and the O.K.C.'s railhead was nearer, they'd ship on the O.K.C.

Ezra had not forgotten the young Illinois cattle-dealer who had been to see him so long ago, and he found McCoy was still in Abilene. He didn't have to work very hard to persuade McCoy to move south to Wichita, especially when he told him that he would arrange for \$15,000 to be made available to McCoy to build the best cattle-handling facilities in Kansas. McCoy was more than happy to unshackle himself from his relationship with the K.P. and the town of Abilene, and he went to work on Wichita with a will. Wyatt had brought the O.K.C. rails into town

the preceding September, and the trail-drivers needed no second invitation to shorten their journey north by two or three days' ride.

Wichita lay in well watered, grassy country where cattle could fatten up rapidly after the rigors of the drive before being sold and shipped east. In addition, the O.K.C. offered advantages which none of its competitors could match. Ezra had a guaranteed market in Chicago, and a direct shipping route to that city. The cattle would get there sleek and fat, not gaunt and weak from a roundabout journey over a dozen different lines. On top of all that, Ezra cut his freight rates by a third.

The Kansas Pacific had been charging \$150 a carload from Abilene to Chicago. Ezra offered a hundred-dollar rate from Wichita. Every time they tried to win back the business by a rate reduction, Ezra reduced his own rates still further. It was a contest that the K.P. simply could not win, for they did not have the cast-iron backing that Ezra Carver had carefully arranged while the O.K.C. was still inching out across the prairie from Shawnee.

Philip Armour, a former California gold-miner whom Ezra had met when Armour brought back letters for him from Theo in San Francisco in the 'fifties, had gone out to Chicago in 1867. Armour set up a high-butchering operation, using as capital the fortune he had made during the war by selling pork short. By 1871 Armour was one of Chicago's Big Twenty slaughterers, and Ezra had lost no time in making a deal with him to handle all the cattle which would be shipped out of Wichita. Armour was more than pleased with a guaranteed supply that—by no coincidence—excluded his competitors. Ezra in turn had his guaranteed market and prices. He saw to it that Sam Ward invested in Armour stocks through nominees: he wanted a share in all the proceeds of the cattle trade. There was a secondary fortune to be made in what Armour produced as by-product: glues, fertilizers and leather goods.

The O.K.C. had grown by leaps and bounds in the first two years of its existence. Wyatt and his crew were already nearly at Fort Dodge, almost three hundred miles from the original starting point at Shawnee. With the carefully negotiated deals for trackage that Ezra and Sam Ward had

stitched together, their share-by-share purchase of enough holdings to guarantee use of it, the O.K.C. had become a major railroading enterprise. It owned twenty-two locomotives, thirty-eight passenger cars, and over 700 freight cars, plus another 250 or so being used in construction work at the end of track and elsewhere. Its net earnings in the first full year of operations had been over half a million dollars, and—on paper, at least—it looked like a highly successful concern. Only Ezra and Sam Ward knew how perilously thin were its resources spread. The revenue was no more than enough to repay the interest on the huge loans Ezra had negotiated with Cooke, and the necessary dividends to the railroad's stockholders. Construction was still being financed on a catch-as-catch-can basis, with government loans, county bonds and any other moneys that Ezra could pry loose from federal or state treasuries.

This latter means of raising finance had lately become so difficult as to be almost foolhardy. All at once, it seemed, the public and the Press were up in arms against graft and corruption, even though that selfsame graft and corruption had been a fact of public life for decades, and would go on being a fact for decades more. Throughout 1871 the very newspapers whose journalists he had so contemptuously controlled, to whose proprietors he had handed hundreds of thousands of dollars in "city advertising," turned on "Boss" Tweed and his Tammany henchmen and tore them to shreds. The *New York Times*, in particular, mounted a campaign which even Tweed's toadying sycophants on the *Sun* could produce nothing to offset. Three millions and more had been paid by the city for "building repairs" that had no right to have cost more than one tenth of that sum, shouted the *Times*. Eleven millions more paid out for a still-unfinished county court house that any honest builder would gladly have built for less than three. For "printing, advertising, and stationery" alone the city had paid out more than seven million dollars in two and a half years. Tweed's cronies, henchmen and hangers-on were not only blatant in taking and spending their graft, they were brazen in their disregard of public opinion. The city debt had jumped from about \$36,000,000 in 1868 to more than \$136,000,000

by the end of 1870. God alone knew how many of those millions had gone straight into the pockets of the Tweed ring, the newspapers screamed.

His downfall was fortuitous, ironic. One of the chiefs of the City Finance Department was fatally injured while sleigh-riding in December 1870. His successor left a vacancy which was filled by Matthew J. O'Rourke, a young man too lowly to have yet attracted the attention of the Tweed mob. In his new office, untainted by venery, county book-keeper O'Rourke opened up the books and in them found the most glaring, the most astonishing gaps. Gradually he put together a dossier of documents and other evidence of the enormous frauds being perpetrated upon the city of New York, and when it was completed he took it to the *Times*.

All hell broke loose, but all hell had broken loose before and nobody had cared much. It might have all been written off as just another of those periodic outbursts of moral indignation in which the newspapers frequently indulged had it not been for the remark "Boss" Tweed made when he was taxed with the documented and itemized list of his frauds. Impudently Tweed asked the *Times*—and by inference the world—what they thought they were going to do about it. It was too much. Bad enough that frauds had been perpetrated. Worse that dozens, hundreds of city officials were implicated. Insupportable that, when asked where all the money had gone, the chief engineer of all this venery replied airily, "Where the woodbine twineth." Tweed was arrested on October 26, 1871 and held on bail of one million dollars.

One outfall of Tweed's exposure was the end of the checkered career of James Fisk. Fisk had befriended a young fellow named Ned Stokes, a ne'er-do-well with private means, who had replaced the fat man in the affections of Josie Mansfield. The town was enjoying itself hugely at Jim Fisk's expense; he was paying the rent on a house in which he was being unmercifully cuckolded. When Fisk found out—and, of course, there were plenty who were more than happy to give him all the juicy details—Jim retaliated by cutting off Josie's money. Josie riposted by telling Jim that if he didn't keep up the payments she

was going to tell all to the newspapers. Jim still balked, whereupon Josie decided to sue him for fifty thousand dollars which she claimed he had promised but not paid her. Jim talked to his lawyers, and they filed an affidavit forthwith saying Josie was living with Ned Stokes and therefore had forfeited any right to Fisk's support. It was one thing to live in sin with a man, but quite another to have it published, and at that by your former lover. Josie, goaded by Stokes, sued Fisk for libel. Great fun for everyone in town: everyone except Fisk. He wasn't just another rich, fat fool: he was a full partner in the Erie Railroad. Any mud that stuck to him stuck also to it. Mansfield's lawyers had shrewdly told the Press that, among other things, her suit would expose the Erie's connections with the Tweed ring. Jay Gould took one look at the dangerous situation that was developing and dropped Fisk like a hot potato.

The trial opened amid a blaze of publicity that they said made old P. T. Barnum green with envy. Fisk was a pathetic figure by this time, shambling about in a strange "naval" uniform he had designed for himself. Stokes, in an immaculate Alexis overcoat, was as sleek as an otter, and between his dark good looks and Josie's devastating eyes Fisk's case was judged doomed. To everyone's surprise, however, the grand jury indicted Stokes and Mansfield for attempted blackmail. Five minutes after he was told of the verdict, Stokes went looking for Fisk. He found the fat man in the Grand Central Hotel on Broadway at 4th Street. As Fisk went up the wide stairway from the lobby to the mezzanine, Stokes confronted him and shot him dead as mutton. Not a few old timers tapped the sides of their noses knowledgeably, and remarked how providential for his partners in the Erie Railroad was Fisk's taking off. Gould, Astor and Belmont would weather the storm, they agreed. All Erie's sins would be buried with Fisk.

Ironically, it was Tweed's staunchest former newspaper ally which next took up the anti-corruption cudgels. The New York *Sun* had only one year earlier been full of exhortations in support of erecting a statue to Tweed, of building and endowing a Tweed Hospital in the seventh ward. Now, as if to forcefully dissociate itself from such

memories, the paper ran banner headline accusations against the Credit Mobilier, construction company of the Union Pacific Railroad. Vice-President Schuyler Colfax, Henry Wilson, the current Republican candidate for president, and many others were named as recipients of bribes, in the form of Credit Mobilier stocks, for favors shown U.P. Frauds and bribery on a gargantuan scale were hinted at; it was even suggested that Credit Mobilier's tentacles reached as far as the Oval Office itself. More revelations were promised imminently, and the shadow of them lay over the Exchange like an ominous cloud. Next, it was said, would be Jay Cooke, who had picked up Josiah Perham's defunct dream, the People's Pacific Railroad, at fifteen cents on the dollar. He had renamed it the Northern Pacific, and was now trying to raise a \$300,000,000 government loan. It was said that to encourage things along Cooke had paid several millions into Grant's coffers to finance the President's re-election—for favors to be received? Let the muckrakers get hold of that little stick of dynamite and see what happened!

"I'll be damned glad to see this year out," Ezra said to old Sam Ward one evening. He had not seen the old boy for a while; and all at once he realized that Sam was not just old, but that now he was aged, frail and stick-thin. His hands trembled on the top of the silver-headed cane which he used to get about. Somehow it seemed like treachery, that Sam Ward should suddenly become infirm and palsied just when Ezra needed him the most. It had always seemed to Ezra that Sam would never grow old; now he was forced to consider a future in which the old man would play no part.

"What do you think will happen, Mr. Sam?" Ezra asked. In all the years he had known Ward he had never called him by any other name.

"Our citizens are undergoing one of their infrequent convulsions of morality," Ward said, smiling an old man's thin smile. "They are looking for sacrifices and they will have them. The Credit Mobilier thing will ruin Ames, mark my words. Durant has set him up, and Congress will cut him down."

"Explain," Ezra said.

"Durant sold out in 'sixty-nine," Sam Ward said. "As soon as the Golden Spike was driven, the golden goose was dead. The government money stopped flowing the day the rails were joined in Utah. Durant isn't interested in running railroads, boy, he's interested in money. So he's taken his pickings and run. When the world discovers how Ames bribed his fellow Congressmen with stocks and shares in the railroad to get grants and other favors, they won't give a damn that he did it at Durant's bidding. They'll crucify him."

"Ah," Ezra said, seeing now what the old man was driving at.

"Ah, indeed," Sam said, a faint twinkle in the tired old eyes. "You're a good student, Ezra. A little slow on your feet sometimes. Too damned impulsive by half. But basically sound. You see what we have to do?"

"Unload," Ezra said. "And quickly."

"Yes," Ward said, "but most of all, quietly. If one word of what you're up to leaks, you'll be headline news in the *Sun* yourself!"

Without fuss or hate, Ezra went to work on the records of the O.K.C. and—more importantly—those of the Finance, Construction & Contracting Corporation of Worcester, Mass. At the same time, he sold off all his remaining O.K.C. stocks and bonds, dividing his holdings equally between his two sons, and using straw men set up by Ward to protect them. Ward's lawyer Robert Widenmann handled the details with laudable discretion. When the matter was completed, Ezra retained only his position as secretary of the O.K.C. Railroad. Curtis Singer had died early in 1872, and had been replaced by Roper and Williams, who jointly held the position of president of the line. This gave Ezra effective day-to-day control of the railroad, which was what he wanted. The difference was that now, should any investigation of the finances of the railroad or of the Massachusetts corporation be instigated, he could truthfully swear that he no longer had any direct financial interest in either company. He could also claim a regrettable, but not criminally poor, memory with regard to any financial transactions which might or might not have been effected, in Washington or in Kansas, by the

deceased president of the Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad, the much-loved and universally lamented Senator Curtis B. Singer of Kansas, or, for that matter, by himself. Let them chew on that, he said to Sam Ward, and see where it gets them.

"You're still banking with Cooke?" the old man asked.

"Why not?"

"Don't like the man," Sam said. "Never have."

"He's sound enough, isn't he?"

"I suppose so," Sam Ward said grudgingly. "That's not what worries me, boy."

"What does?"

"You, Ezra. If anything happened to you, nobody would know how to put the pieces back together again."

"You'd know," Ezra said.

"No use relying on these old bones, Ezra," the old man said, his laugh a fragile sound in the silent room. "I won't be around much longer."

"Mr. Sam, I'm relying on you to live forever," Ezra said.

"Wouldn't want to," was the blunt reply. "Old men die, boy, and it's as well they do, or they'd make the whole world moldy with their maunderings."

"Hold on for a while," Ezra said, trying for a lightness of tone he was not altogether sure he managed. "I need you."

"You need nobody, Ezra," Sam Ward said. "You never really did. You're a lone wolf and you always will be. I'm proud of you, all the same."

"Thank you," Ezra said, and meant it.

"Thanks be damned," the old man snorted. "You just take care of yourself when I'm gone. As for me, I'll be glad to lie down and take my rest. I've seen all the dam-foolery I want and I don't relish the variety that's on the menu. Neither will you, boy."

"I'll manage," Ezra said. "Nothing's going to happen to me."

"Good," the old man said. "I hope you're right."

Ezra never saw him alive again. Sam Ward died two days before Ulysses S. Grant was elected for a second term, his death the first in a series of hammer blows to

Ezra's personal life which were to make him look back upon the year 1872 with hatred and dismay. Within one short week he lost his oldest confidant, he lost his father, and he lost Jenny. Fate had shown her teeth with a vengeance, and Ezra found himself viewing the year ahead with the bleakest foreboding.

He never really understood what happened with Jenny. He had known that there was something wrong between them, something that had been growing. It had been partly brought about by his own tensions, his preoccupation with financial matters; but that was not all it was. They had discovered serious differences of viewpoint that were harder to reconcile than his mere absence because of business. He had always known, for instance, that Jenny was more than sympathetic to the Women's Movement, and even if he thought it twaddle he acknowledged her right to an opinion. Nevertheless, he told her, she had to take account of his position. Her involvement with people like Susan Anthony and the Woodhull woman was only acceptable insofar as it did not damage him. People knew who Jenny Bruce was, and quite a lot of them knew what her relationship was to Ezra Carver. As long as it was not thrown in their faces, they would accept it; but let her preach the often unacceptable gospel of women's suffrage, and that relationship would be used against them with vicious swiftness. So it had finally proved. Jenny had been one of the militants who accompanied Susan Anthony to Rochester when Mrs. Anthony attempted to cast a vote there in the presidential election. They were all arrested, and more than a little play had been made in the newspapers about the actress Jenny Bruce who was on the one hand a militant campaigner for women's rights and on the other known to be "the intimate companion" of railroad tycoon Ezra Carver. Susan Anthony's opponents were many; they hardly balked at using Jenny as a weapon against Anthony if it was offered them on a plate. Ezra's enemies were possibly even more numerous. Jenny's actions gave them levers he preferred them not to have.

"It had to be done," Jenny said. "The Fourteenth Amendment had to be tested."

"But not by you," Ezra said.

"We knew what we were doing," she said sulkily.

"So do I," he said. "You were making jackasses of yourselves, and a fool of me. I don't mind the former, but I resent the latter!"

"You, you, you!" she shouted, sudden, unexpected vehemence. "Why does everything have to revolve around you, and what you want?"

"Because, my dear," he said silkily, "I am the one who pays the bills."

"Oh," she sneered. "Money! Now it's money. You men think you can win every argument with your damned money!"

"I haven't noticed you turning up your nose at it!" he snapped, his own anger rising a little in response to her.

"Damn you!" Jenny said. "You make us dependent upon you, and then complain because we are! Is that your idea of a fair balance between men and women?"

"Don't be childish," he said. "You know it isn't."

"Tell me what is, then!" she said. She wanted to hurt, too. She didn't really know why. Sometimes you just wanted to hurt. "You seem to know all the answers to everything. Tell me the answer."

"Jenny, Jenny," he said, being patient and long-suffering, and wittingly making her angrier. "You are advocating universal suffrage and universal suffrage won't work. It's one thing for you and Susan Anthony or some other educated woman to have the vote. You can't automatically conclude that it will have the same value to the wife of some Missouri sharecropper!"

"Why not?"

"Because it would be stupid, that's why not!"

"Stupid?" she flared. "Stupid to give a woman the same rights you have already given negro slaves?"

"Jenny, you cannot compare women's rights and the slavery question."

"Yes, you can," she said. "Women are slaves, aren't they? Chattels of you wonderful, omniscient men?"

"You won't alter anything by screaming and shouting!"

"I am not screaming or shouting!" she shouted.

"You are, and I want you to stop," he said angrily. "I

do not come here to be harangued about women's rights, a subject for which, by and large, I do not give a tinker's curse!"

"What do you give a tinker's curse for—except money?" Jenny Bruce said. "Money and your own gratification? You've never cared for anything or anyone except yourself!"

"Jenny," he said, "I want this to stop now." He expected her to obey him. Enough was enough. She looked at him as if he was mad, and threw back her head, giving a scornful laugh.

"Why?" she said. "Don't you like the truth?"

"It isn't the truth," he said.

"What is the truth then? Tell me! Tell me what it is that brings you here, Ezra! Is it because you love me?"

"Don't say something you'll regret, Jenny," he said stiffly.

"Answer me, damn you!" she cried, rage making her eyes brim with tears. "Is that all I am—your whore?"

"Jenny!" he said, deeply shocked. She had never spoken to him like this and he did not know what to do. Her face was flushed, her body trembling. Her hands were clawed as if she was preparing to attack him. "Get hold of yourself!" he said.

"I have got hold of myself," she said through clenched teeth, "for the first time. I am very controlled indeed, Ezra. I want you to understand that I know what I am saying."

"I see," he said.

"No, you don't," she said, "but I am going to make you. I am going to make you see yourself for what you are, whether you like it or not!"

"And what is that?" he said, knowing it had gone too far, knowing it was over. It wouldn't matter what she said now. The thing was done.

"You are a cold-hearted, soulless machine for making money. I want you to see it. And I want you to see what you have made me by using your money."

I thought so, he thought. His face turned to iron and he rose to his full height.

"I made you nothing," he said. "Everything you are, you always were!"

They stood in silence, glaring at each other, adversaries in a duel to the death, seeking an opening to maim, even to kill.

"Get out of my house!" she hissed. "Never come back!"

"Jenny," he said, thinking he owed her at least one last chance. "This is a mistake."

"No," she said, hating him now and knowing that she had hated him for a long time. "It's the first sensible thing I've done since I met you."

"You want me to go for good?"

"Yes," she said, exhausted by it. "It's finished, Ezra."

"I don't understand," he said. "I thought you loved me."

"You wouldn't have known if I had," Jenny said.

Ezra was still trying to get his battered emotions into some sort of shape when he received word that his father was dead. There had been a huge fire in Boston on November 9th. It had destroyed a large part of the city, and thirteen people were known to be dead. Old Dr. Carver, well over seventy, had gone out into the streets to care for the maimed and hurt. For three days and nights he had worked without sleep; in the last thirty-six hours he ate nothing at all. He was brought back to the house on Beacon Hill filthy, bedraggled and exhausted. They cut away the sooty, blood-spattered remnants of his clothing, bathed him gently, and put him to bed still trembling with fatigue. He plunged into a deep sleep from which he never woke.

The funeral was a gloomy, rain-sodden affair. The November sky was leaden and gray, the earth churned like a battlefield. Ezra and Theodore, who had come east for the funeral, supported their weeping mother to the graveside. Their feet squelched in the muddy grass, and Ezra winced as the wet clay banged down on the lid of the coffin. Jane, he thought, seeing the pale, sad face of his wife. He had never really been close to his father, not the way that some sons were, because Hartwell Carver had never fully understood the drive that was in his younger son. He had gradually become proud of Ezra's achievements, regarding him sometimes with a puzzled awe, as if he would never quite comprehend how he had spawned such a cub.

He took to regaling his cronies with the details of Ezra's successes, or talking about Theo's growing business interests in California. Yet to the end he was what he had always been, a simple, unpretentious man, no more and no less than a good country doctor.

Ezra looked across the grave at his own sons, standing beneath a shared umbrella. One day they will be looking down into my grave, he thought. I wonder what they will be thinking then? Hart was a handsome nineteen-year-old, spending more time than he should with young women. Hunt was sixteen, a diffident, almost shy boy with a furious temper that had won him the nickname "Paddy." He had asked his father if he could work for the railroad, and Ezra had been vaguely flattered by the request. He had promised to consider it: the boys would have to start somewhere, although he had always hoped that Hart would go into the Law and Hunt into politics. I suppose I ought to spend more time with them, he thought; they are all I have now. Hunt's downcast face caught the light a certain way and he looked like his mother. Strange, Ezra thought, that she should be so much in my mind today. He had not thought of his wife for a long time.

It had been good to see Theo again. They had talked late into the night, every night, since Theo had come home. As Ezra had predicted, Ralston and Darius Mills and the others had squeezed Theo out of the Nevada silver business, and had gained almost complete control of such mining as was presently going on in Virginia City. Little though that was, it produced enough profit to fund a host of other ventures there and in San Francisco. Ralston's personal fortune had grown at the same rate as that of the Bank of California, and he was among the acknowledged leaders of San Francisco business. Every day of his life, Theo said, was spent listening to propositions that ranged from plans for some new factory to civic improvements. Every one of them was a new means of making the Ralston empire even bigger.

"He controls a woolen mill, a sugar refinery, a carriage works, vineyards, furniture factories, watch factories, silk works, real-estate, tobacco firms—the list's endless, Ez. Irrigation schemes, dry docks at Oakland, iron foundries.

And hotels. He's moving into the hotel business in a big way."

"Go on," Ezra said. He had his own opinions of Mr. Ralston, but for the moment he kept them to himself.

"He and the Ring—that's what everyone calls his party—built a new hotel on Market Street, the Grand. Four hundred rooms. Everyone goes there. It's the showplace of the city!"

"What did it cost?"

"The best part of six hundred thousand, so I'm told," Theo said. "It's an astonishing place!"

"For that money it would have to be," Ezra said sourly.

"Oh, wait, you haven't heard it all yet!" Theo said. "They're going to build an even bigger place. Biggest in America. Eight hundred rooms, Ez. Seven stories. They say it will cost six million dollars to build!"

"Six million?" Ezra said. "What is he modelling it on—the Taj Mahal?"

"Almost," Theo grinned. "They're going to call it the *Palace*."

"Ralston must be madder than I thought he was, and that's mad enough!"

"San Francisco doesn't agree with you, Ez. People look at Ralston, the way he lives down at Belmont, and they find it reassuring. Ralston can do it, they say. He's got the dollars. He must be as rich as Croesus, otherwise he wouldn't even contemplate building such a place, would he?"

"You think that way?"

"Not entirely," Theo said. "But that's the way the popular vote goes."

"Well, you know how I feel about the popular vote," Ezra said, as sourly as before.

"Yes," Theo smiled, remembering. "'If ninety-nine per cent of the public are for it, there must be something catastrophically wrong with it.' Wasn't that what you used to say?"

"Still do," Ezra said. "That's why I view your Mr. Ralston with such deep suspicion."

"I agree with you," Theo said, to Ezra's surprise. "I think his money's spread as thin as ground frost. I think

he's so financially entangled that he doesn't know which dollars are his and which are the Banks!"

"That could be serious," Ezra said. "If a man like Ralston goes under, so do thousands of others."

"I think that's what is going to happen, Ez," Theo said.

"What makes you so sure?"

"I'll tell you. I know to a penny these days what is being taken out of the Nevada mines. It isn't enough to finance Ralston's estate, let alone his businesses. I know the profits of the Pacific & Mission Woolen Mill, the Kimball Carriage Factory, the sugar refinery—all of it. And it still isn't enough."

"How do you know?"

"My new partners," Theo said. "Two businessmen named Jim Flood and Bill O'Brien. Flood used to have a carriage repair shop on the corner of Ellis and Mason. O'Brien was in the chandlery business. They went bust in the war and went into saloon-keeping. Picked up so many tips behind the bar they were able to buy seats on the Exchange. In 'sixty-nine they met two mining men—John Mackay is one of them, Jim Fair the other. Mackay owned a mine in Virginia City, the Kentuck. Fair had once been superintendent of the old Hale & Norcross mine. Both of them were looking for finance to make an underground exploration drift on the Comstock."

"A what?"

"A sort of geological survey. Fair and Mackay are sure that there's still a bonanza buried under the existing workings. They needed finance and they needed it from someone who knew how to keep his mouth shut. Obviously they couldn't go to Ralston."

"Quite," Ezra said, with a dry smile.

"They went to Flood and O'Brien, and since Jim and Bill are not only my brokers but my partners in a number of other things, they brought Mackay and Fair to me."

"And you've financed this . . . exploration drift?"

"We've formed a partnership. The idea is to break Ralston's monopoly. Nobody in Virginia City has the time of day for him and his crowd. They put up three and a half million when the mine owners were in trouble, then

sat back and let them get in deeper and deeper. When they couldn't pay up the Bank of California foreclosed."

"I think I said they'd do that," Ezra observed.

"You were right and I was wrong," Theo agreed. "They had set up Union Mill & Mining exactly as you said, to divert all the mining business to the Ring. That was when they squeezed me out. It cost me the best part of a million."

"I remember," Ezra said.

"So, now, very quietly, the five of us are picking up shares in Virginia City mines," Theo explained. "We've already more or less got control of one, and we've got our eye on a few others. When we've got what we want we'll consolidate!"

"And then?"

"Then, it will depend on whether Fair and Mackay are right. If they are—"

"Ah," Ezra said. "If."

"Yes, if," Theo said. "If we are right, Ralston and his people will be at full stretch. He'll be strapped, trying to keep hold of what he's got and keep us out at the same time. I think he'll break."

"You sound as if you'd like that."

"I would," Theo said. "By God, I would."

"And what's to be my part in all this?"

"I want you to come to San Francisco," Theo said. "Meet Mackay, Flood and the others. If we strike it heavy, Ez, we'll have millions to invest. I'd like to ask them to think about putting money into a western branch of the O.K.C. from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and then east to meet you."

"Do they know you're talking to me about that?"

"They know we're talking, but not what we're talking about."

"I see," Ezra said. "Well, let me think about that. I've got a few irons in the fire myself. Maybe I'll come out in the New Year."

"You won't believe how San Francisco has changed, Ez," Theo said. "You'll love it. It will do you good to get away from all this cold and sleet. You look tired."

"You think San Francisco rain and fog will cure it?" Ezra grinned. "All right, I'll come."

There wasn't anything to stay in New York for any more, anyway, he thought. I might as well go. Chicago, Kansas City. Wyatt could take him out to end of track: he hadn't seen the rails actually being laid. Yes, he thought, why not? He hadn't had any kind of vacation for years, ten years and more. Ezra Carver sighed. Somehow, he couldn't get excited about the idea and he wondered why. There was little elation in anything any more. Money is the root of all boredom, he thought. The old nagging ache was back in his left arm.

The following February all of Sam Ward's predictions came resoundingly true. The House of Representatives passed a vote of censure against Oakes Ames of the Credit Mobilier, steam-rolling over his objections and his protestations of honesty and innocence. The man whom Abraham Lincoln had personally begged to take control of the ailing Union Pacific Railroad was ruined; Ames returned to his Massachusetts home broken and disgraced. Ezra had no intention of suffering the same fate. The newspapers, fangs dripping, were already looking around for fresh meat, and it wasn't going to be him. After making certain financial arrangements with Jay Cooke, his banker, most of which had to do with the transfer of funds to San Francisco, Ezra set out for Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City.

Chicago was a wonder, bustling and busy, with practically every trace of the disastrous fire already swept away. The downtown business area was full of imposing stone buildings, many with marble facing, not a few as high as eight floors—sky scrapers, they were calling them. He learned that a new building had been raised every single day of the preceding year, and had his first—very trepidant—ride in an elevator. Wooden buildings had been permanently outlawed from the city center; there would never be another great fire, Chicagoans assured him. He stayed at the new Grand Pacific Hotel on La Salle Street, and was given a conducted tour of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company's new plant, at Blue Island and Western Avenue on the South Branch. He lunched with

Philip Armour and the board of directors of the Armour Packing Plant. They told him that they would be moving the company's headquarters to Milwaukee in a couple of years, a choice piece of indiscretion which a year before he would have hastened to telegraph in their long-established code to Sam Ward. Now there was no one to tell; the information was of no use to him, and he would no more have given it away than he would have tried to fly off the top of his elegant and imposing hotel's roof.

A week in Chicago, then another in St. Louis, the country's third largest city, completed Ezra's business. He headed for Kansas City, where he had arranged to meet Mike Wyatt. The place had changed, grown. He remembered that first time, the dinner with old Senator Singer, a defeated old man who had damned Ezra Carver's black soul to hell. Well, old man, he thought with a twisted smile, I'm still here. He walked down to the O.K.C. depot. It was brick-built and imposing, and he felt a glow of pride: he had made all this possible. Wyatt was waiting for him, with a short "special" ready on the siding—a locomotive and one carriage.

"It's all I can spare," he said unapologetically. He didn't like Ezra and he didn't care if Ezra knew it. "We don't live fancy out here."

"Good," said Ezra, climbing aboard. "Let's go to Wichita."

"Well, there she is!" Joseph McCoy said, jarring Ezra out of his reverie. They were on a broad, almost empty street, both sides of which were lined with frame buildings interspersed with the odd one or two of brick or stone. All were faced with the inevitable false fronts, and defaced by a kaleidoscope of signs of every size, shape and description. The street itself was unpaved, hock-deep in dust, and bordered on each side by horse-bitten hitching rails at which scrawny cow-ponies stood hipshot, switching their scanty tails at the clouds of flies. The sidewalks were of warped and none-too-solid-looking board, and everything looked mud-gray and tinder dry. To the right of the wagon Ezra saw a three by four-foot sign.

NOTICE

ALL PERSONS ARE HEREBY FORBIDDEN
THE CARRYING OF FIREARMS OR OTHER
DANGEROUS WEAPONS WITHIN THE CITY
LIMITS OF WICHITA UNDER PENALTY OF
FINE OR IMPRISONMENT

BY ORDER OF THE MAYOR
M. MEAGHER
CITY MARSHAL

"Douglas Avenue," McCoy said, giggling the team forward.

Ezra half-listened as they pointed out the landmarks to him. He had eyes and ears, and he knew frontier towns. Behind the mud-gray façade of stores and hotels, the half-way-respectable saloons and gambling halls, would be the shanties and the sod huts of the whores, the tents and dug-outs of the itinerants, the bottle and tin-can dumps with their population of scavenging stray cats and pack rats. They wouldn't show him any of those streets. Instead, heading west, they crossed Market Street and approached the junction of Main and Douglas. There was a big two-story building on the north-east corner, solidly built of brick, with a wooden awning all round the porch, and stone moldings above the second-floor windows. On the top was a sign that identified it as The New York Store.

"That's Jake Karatofsky's place," Jim Hope said. "He came down here from Ellsworth last fall. Clothing and dry goods—all the Texas boys get their stuff there. Got the biggest show windows in town."

"Lets off part of it to a feller named Harknett," Mead added. "He sells drugs and medicines."

"Where's your place?" Ezra asked Hope, more for something to say than anything else. I'd better try and look a bit more enthusiastic, he told himself.

"Block and a half north," Hope said. "Opposite the court house. You'll see it later."

"Wichita Savings & Loan over on the other side, there," McCoy said. "And this here is Whitey Rupps' place, the Keno House."

"Later on there'll be a brass band playing on the balcony," Greiffenstein said. "Strauss."

Ezra nodded, ticking off the names in his head as they rolled by. Fechheimer (clothing), Cogswell (cigars), Knoblauch's (restaurant). He made appropriate noises as his hosts pointed out the Texas House, and the half-finished Douglas Avenue Hotel.

"That there belongs to Mead and me," Greiffenstein said. "I reckon she gonna cost twenty-five thousand before we get done."

"That's a lot of money in these parts," Mead said.

Down at the end of the street ahead of them Ezra could see the toll bridge. Beyond it lay the squalid clutter of Delano, the red-light district of Wichita. Everything lay still and quiet beneath the bright morning sun.

"Is it always this quiet?" Ezra asked.

"Hardly," McCoy said. "Most of the boys sleep it off in the mornings. Town starts to get going by about two. By ten it's hell on wheels."

They turned right up Water Street and right again on First Street. The buildings were less pretentious here, huddled together as if hoping somehow that, combined, their appearance would improve. It was not so: they looked like what they were, cheap clapboard shacks. Some were cribs and deadfalls, Ezra knew, others the offices of lawyers, land salesmen, insurance brokers, shopkeepers. Co-existence was a way of life in towns like Wichita; you had no choice of neighbor. On the corner of First and Main, Hope pointed out the First National Bank building, another two-story brick structure. Not only did it have a basement, they said, but its second floor was occupied by Masonic lodge rooms with a carpet that had cost five hundred dollars. On the opposite corner was a two-story grocery that looked as if it was doing brisk business. McCoy told Ezra it was run by a man named Tommy Docherty and his wife Dora. Their sister-in-law taught at the local school.

On the north-western corner of the intersection was a three-story brick and stone hotel called the Occidental,

which dwarfed the smaller court house adjacent to it. A huge steel triangle hung on the court house porch.

"For emergencies," Hope explained. "Howdy, Mike!"

"Howdy," said a short, compactly built man sitting on a bentwood chair beneath the shaded porch, his right leg braced against the upright. Ezra noted that the man wore a pistol in a scabbard at his belt and commented on the fact.

"That's our town marshal, Mike Meagher," Hope explained. He pronounced the name Maygar. "Good man. His brother John is sheriff of the county."

The wagon turned down Main. Saloons, saloons. Emil Werners' saloon. Billy Collins's saloon. The Southern. The Lone Star. The Empire.

"He looks young," Ezra said, referring to Meagher.

"Twenty-seven," McCoy said, adding darkly, "not many of them die of old age."

"Damned if I'd do his job for ninety dollars a month," Hope said feelingly.

I'll bet you wouldn't, Ezra thought. You'd take the Texas dollars any way that didn't put your neat little pin-striped skin in danger, but you'd leave the real blood and guts to Meagher. Pay him ninety dollars a month, and treat him like a menial.

"The cowboys give you a lot of trouble?" he asked.

"Enough, Mr. Carver," Hope said, "enough. You ask Judge Jewett tonight."

"Tonight?"

"We sort of thought we'd throw you a little dinner party," McCoy said. "There are a lot of people out here who would like to get to meet you, Mr. Carver. And we figured you might like to try a buffalo steak."

Oh God, thought Ezra, knowing there was no escape.

Two days later he rode out to the end of the track on the work train with Mike Wyatt. The engineer was burned black-brown by the relentless prairie sun. He had grown a copious beard, and his hands were rough and calloused. In the sun-darkened face Wyatt's eyes were an almost startling blue, and Ezra again detected the dislike in them. Wyatt had long since cottoned on to how Ezra Carver had

maneuvered him but he thought that he'd probably had the best of the bargain. He had fully intended to leave the Kansas Pacific anyway, and working for the O.K.C. was considerably more lucrative than working for the K.P. had been. In addition to that, he'd had his little adventure with the New York girl. That was something to think about when you were lying alone in a narrow bunk on a work train out in the howling winds of a Kansas winter. Agatha had found out, of course. She had an instinct for his affairs. He didn't give a damn what she thought. If he ever got back to the East, he'd look the girl up. So he could thank Ezra Carver for that, too. Even so, he still resented Carver's thinking that he could push Michael Wyatt around like a pawn on a chessboard, and it showed in his eyes as hostility. For Wyatt's hostility Ezra gave not a damn, as long as the man was doing what he was paid to do.

"What are you averaging now?" he asked, as they rocked across the featureless prairie.

"Two miles a day on flat terrain," Wyatt said. "One day last week we laid three miles and four hundred feet of track. That's our best yet, but we'll do better before we're finished."

"How many men have you got on the payroll at the moment?"

"Two thousand, maybe twenty-five hundred. It varies from week to week."

"And what service are we running now?"

"Kansas City to Larned, daily."

"We getting much traffic?"

"Not a hell of a lot," Wyatt said, with a grim smile. "There's not much to see in Larned. They call it the meanest town in Kansas."

"By God," Ezra said, "it must be pretty tough."

"It's that," Wyatt allowed. "But Larned is positively decorous compared with end of track."

"Where's that?"

"Outside of Fort Dodge. They call it Dodge City."

"Does it stink as badly as Wichita?"

"No, sir," Wyatt said. "Worse."

The locomotive sounded its whistle as they approached end of track, and shuddered slowly to a stop. Ezra and

Mike Wyatt stepped down from the train and the tangible flat heat of the plains smote them like a weapon. Ezra could hear the clanking of couplings, the hoarse shouts of men. The work area lay behind a rise some hundreds of yards ahead. Ezra remembered the prairie as he had first seen it, the far-off line of the river and the sweet, heart-breaking song of the meadowlarks. Now the earth was scarred and ugly, torn by the passage of uncounted wagons and carts, machinery and men. The newly laid tracks shone like swords in the bright sun, curving around the bluffs up ahead. There were flat cars and wagons loaded with ties and rails and other materials standing in a long line on a twin track without beginning or end, at one side of the main track. Behind them the locomotive which had drawn the single carriage in which Wyatt and Ezra had travelled panted like a tired horse.

They walked through the unbelievable clutter of materials, and up to the top of the bluffs. The scene spread before them was incredible; hundreds and hundreds of men swarming here and there like ants on a kicked-over ant-hill. In the foreground stood the enormous work train, its three locomotives ranged behind each other like elephants in a circus. In front of them, seventeen or eighteen wagons stretched, solid as a row of office buildings. Up front were trucks loaded with switch stands, targets, timbers for truck repairs, iron rods, steel bars, tools. Then came a feed store and blacksmith shop; in the next car, a carpenter shop. In another, the wash-house. Then two huge sleeping cars, crammed with bunks occupied in shifts by exhausted men who fell into them before they had cooled from the body heat of their last occupants. More huge trucks housed eating rooms. Next to them was the high-roofed wagon that contained the kitchen; the smell of stew issued from it like bad breath. Behind the kitchen were the store cars, and then more of the gigantic sleeping trucks. There were supply cars and water cars, and, nearest to the engines, Wyatt's own twin-car quarters. They contained a kitchen, a parlour and a bedroom. By the standards of the rest of the men out there, Wyatt was living like a king.

The engineer explained what was happening down below, and Ezra watched, hypnotized by the hellish rhythm

of it. Six-men crews swung rails down from the supply train, loading them into the tracklayers' carts. Then with apparent disregard of the horrifying noise they were making, they threw in the appropriate number of fishplates and spikes and chairs. Another tracklayer had his cart in position the instant the mulewhackers had shouted the first away, careering towards the end of track at a dead run. Wedgers slammed their wedges beneath the wheels of the cart to bring it to a dead stop at exactly the right spot. As they did so, the five-men teams waiting by the newly laid ties slid out the rails—there were special rollers set into the tracklayers' carts, Wyatt said—two at a time, five men to a rail. Each then swung out the chairs and fishplates, laying them in the marked spots beside the rails. Then they got out of the way, running ahead to wait for the arrival of the cart that was already being whipped towards them. Swing out the rails and lay them down, then out of the way again as the spikers stepped in, mauls swinging. Three strokes to the spike, ten spikes to the rail, forty rails to the load.

"Four rails every minute," Wyatt said. "Four hundred to the mile."

Two thousand men, working in unison, a sweating rabble of Irish laborers, Chinese immigrants, half-breed Indians, God alone knew what else. Blacksmiths and wranglers, cooks, engineers, tie men, graders, gandy dancers. Carpenters were paid four dollars a day, Ezra remembered from some forgotten docket, laborers three. You could almost see the hammering, shouting, clattering, jangling mob moving forward by inches across the burning land, following the scraped-out grade on which the tie crews were laying the wooden ties. Every single tie, every splinter of wood had to be cut in Colorado and rafted down the Arkansas, then freighted out here on the work train or by mule team. There was no timber worth the name on the Kansas prairie, certainly none that could be used for ties. Sleepers, Ezra thought. The British call them sleepers.

Twenty miles ahead of the tie men were the graders, their horses, mules and scrapers littering the prairie like the debris of a shelled town, all along the yellow-brown

scar cut into the ground by the brawny Pikers with their horse and mule plough-teams. The scraper gangs cut and filled the roadbed eight hours at a time, then collapsed into tents or shacks of spare lumber that might house anything up to a hundred more like themselves. They lived on a diet of beans, salt pork, bread and sorghum, sometimes enlivened by buffalo steaks. On Saturday nights they drifted into the local "town," whatever was nearest, and drank up what pay they had in rotgut whisky, or blew it on a ten-minute session with some raddled whore, or got into a fight with some Texas cowboy in one of the tent saloons.

Money, money, money, Ezra thought. It was costing fifty thousand dollars a day to inch the rails across the prairie. Most men never saw that much money in one pile in a lifetime, certainly not men like these. Yet that was what it cost. For the tools—the shovels, picks, drills, axes, saws, hammers. For the food to fill the men's bellies and feed the work animals. For the barrels and boxes and cables and ropes and cotton waste. It went in paying the bridge-monkeys who erected the trestles in the dried-out gullies, the graders who followed them, for the timber they used and the freight it cost to get it to them. Money, money, money. Cooks and flunkies and dishwashers and timekeepers and mulewhackers and walking bosses, hostlers and boarding bosses, all looking for dollars to jingle in their jeans come Saturday night.

"You want to go over and see Dodge City?" Wyatt asked.

"I don't want to," Ezra confessed. "But I suppose I better had."

He knew what to expect, and he wasn't disappointed. The same stink of buffalo hides and manure, the same unlovely scatter of hastily built shacks. Why they insisted on calling these gopher towns cities was beyond his comprehension. So he paid scant attention to Wyatt's account of how the post commandant at Fort Dodge had got together with the army quartermaster and the post sutler and laid out the townsite, or the news that Wright & Rath, the town's leading merchants, had shipped more than 200,000 buffalo hides the preceeding winter.

Dodge City was vile. A few frame buildings, a couple of dozen tents, dugouts, and hastily erected adobes already starting to crumble in the arid sun were the sum total of its attractions. Isaac Moore's Saddle & Harness Shop, a sign announced. Tom O'Keefe's Blacksmith Shop, said another. Zimmerman's Gun Shop. A restaurant. A dry-goods store operated by Alonzo and Webster. Wright & Rath's General Store. Nearly every one of the larger tents and shacks was a saloon; some were also brothels. Sleazy-looking women were washing their bedclothes in great steaming tubs of water behind some of them. There was a street of sorts: the ruts of a thousand wagons and a hundred thousand pairs of boots had printed it indelibly on the prairie. It was as wide as a field, and dozens of wagons trundled up and down it from the depot, their wheels squealing as if in agony. The depot was a sidetracked railroad car, parked in the shadow of the water tower. A hundred yards along the track buffalo bones, piled head high, gleamed whitely in the sun. There was a booming sound like far-off thunder out on the prairies, although the sky was cloudless.

"Buffalo hunters," Wyatt explained tersely. "Place is lousy with 'em."

He took Ezra on a quick tour around town, and introduced him to Bob Wright, a tall, boyish-looking fellow with a heavy moustache and dark hair falling in a cowlick across his forehead.

"Six, seven hundred dollars' worth of business a day, Mr. Carver!" he said proudly. "That's just this store. Mark my words, Mr. Carver. Dodge is going to be a mighty big little city. Mark my words!"

"You seem to carry a big inventory," Ezra remarked, and it was true. The shack which housed Wright & Rath's store might be stark and unpretentious, but he was amazed at the range of goods on display. The potbellied stove, the cast iron coffee grinder with its big wheels, the cracker barrel, all were in their appointed places: how could you have a store without them? But in so primitive a place one did not expect to be able to purchase china tea services, or tilting water basins, or cast-iron boot jacks, or flatirons and kerosene lamps and high button shoes, china jars of

apple butter and plum preserve, copper double-boilers or stone water-coolers. Nevertheless, all of them were there, along with piled displays of Woolson's Mocha & Java Coffee, and tins of Arbuckle's, and Union Leader chewing tobacco, Arnold's writing ink, Stetson hats, Mason's pickle bottles. Shirt buttons and needles, underwear, pants, shirts, boots, big glass jars full of striped stick candy ("very popular with the cowboys," Wright observed) and licorice sticks, patent medicines, hair oil, toilet soap and shaving brushes, hunting knives, balls of string, hand axes and knitting needles, baling wire, tablecloths, shovels and frying pans, tinned peaches and stomach powders, pen nibs and baking soda, augus and chamber pots, bags of flour and boxes of woolen socks, sunbonnets, skilletts and rock salt, hardtack and whetstones, dried apples and corn liquor.

"Your prices aren't what I'd call low," Ezra said to Wyatt. The merchant nodded and grinned as though Ezra had shown the most remarkable percipience.

"Costs money to get this stuff out here, Mr. Carver," he said. "You ought to know that better'n any man."

"Your customers don't mind?"

"No, sir, the boys don't care a hoot in Hades. Some o' them are earning a hundred dollars a day out there, shootin' buffler. They can't eat nothin' but buffler, an' they sure as hell can't eat money!"

He chuckled as though he was sharing a great joke, and he was still smiling when Ezra shook hands and said good-bye. Wright seemed to be enjoying life out there in the wilderness, Ezra thought. Everybody to his own taste, as the lady said when she kissed the cow. They went along the street and called in to meet a restaurant owner named Kelley who was supplying Wyatt with food for the crews.

"Kelley's known all around these parts as 'Dog'," Wyatt told Ezra. "Keeps Irish wolfhounds. Got a mite of the exhibitionist in him."

"What do you serve here?" Ezra asked the man, keeping all expression off his face as he looked around the fly-blown shack.

"Anything you want," Kelley said. "Mostly buffler meat."

"Nuts, guts, or brains!" chimed in a slender young man

standing at the back of the place. He wore a spotless white apron, dark pants and a white shirt. His cleanliness was surprising in so greasy-looking a joint.

"Ed Masterson," Kelley said, by way of introduction. "Ed there is workin' for me till he gets a grubstake, ain't that so, Ed?"

"Yup," Masterson said. "Then I'm goin' out after them buffler again. Make me some tin."

"You gents want to eat?" Kelley asked, pulling a chair away from one of the tables. "Grub's nigh on ready."

"No, thanks," Ezra said hastily. "We've got to get back."

They trudged back along the ragged street, skirting piles of horse manure and litter. Sagebrush still grew in the center of the plaza. Mangy dogs skulked in the spaces between the buildings. The constant buzz of the flies was like an earache.

"Well, you were right," Ezra said to Wyatt. "This is even worse than Wichita."

"Hell, Wichita's paradise compared to this," Wyatt said. "But the soldier boys aren't choosy, and my men don't give any sort of a damn as long as they can get laid or get their bellies full of sheep-dip."

"Sheep-dip?"

"That's what they call the liquor."

"Probably what it is," Ezra said. "Some of these people must be coining money."

"They wouldn't be out here else," Wyatt said. "Would you?"

Ezra looked about him. The town was an ugly blot on the rolling plain, its street a scar, its buildings an affront to the emptiness. The sun glared pitilessly down on the bleached bones, wagons loaded with flint-hard buffalo hides, endless sand-colored prairie. The stink was ubiquitous: the smell of no sanitation, of rotting meat, of filth.

"I see what you mean," he said, and climbed into the wagon. Wyatt slapped the reins across the horses' haunches and they jerked into movement. The inevitable dust boiled up in their wake as soon as they started.

"When do you expect to hit the Colorado line?" Ezra shouted as they bounced back towards the construction camp. There was no road worth the name: Wyatt just

pointed the wagon at the place where the camp was and hit out across the prairie, devil take the hindmost.

"I want to be there by Christmas," Wyatt yelled back. "We lose a lot of men at Christmas-time. They just drift off."

"Tell them something for me," Ezra said. "Tell them that if the O.K.C. is across the Colorado line before Christmas, I'll hand out ten thousand dollars in bonuses. Guaranteed."

"That's very generous," Wyatt said, his eyes giving him away.

"There'll be an extra thousand for you," Ezra said, picking up his cue, "Naturally."

"If we do it, I'll have earned it," Wyatt said. He didn't see any necessity of thanking his boss. If Ezra Carver was willing to pay bonuses, there was something in it for Ezra Carver. Thanks were therefore not in order. He pulled the horses to a halt in the shadow of the special train that had been Ezra's living quarters ever since they had left Kansas City. Ezra looked at it and sighed; the prospect of the journey back east was considerably less than enticing. Even though the carriage had been fitted out with a "parlour" and a "sleeping compartment" it was still hot and noisy and dusty aboard the train, and Kansas had very little in the way of scenery to distract the traveller's mind from his discomforts.

Ezra climbed aboard the train, shaking hands with Wyatt and wishing him luck with the work. The engineer of the train already had steam up; he gave a toot on the whistle that made Wyatt's horses fidget in their traces.

"Harvey's up in the mountains," Wyatt said. "He'll be sorry to have missed you."

"Tell him I'll be in San Francisco," Ezra said. "Until further notice."

"Lucky you," Wyatt said enviously. "I wouldn't mind a couple of nights on the Barbary Coast myself."

"Finish the railroad," Ezra said. "Then you can buy your own Barbary Coast."

"That'll be the day," Wyatt said, and got off the platform at the rear of the carriage. He climbed back into the wagon, and raised his hand in salute as the engineer

tooted his whistle again and put the train into jerking, clanking, reluctant motion.

Ezra braced himself against the corner of his window seat, and stared unseeing at the jumble of work materials the train was passing. A little while later they passed through the sorry sprawl of Dodge City. It looked forlorn, forsaken and forgotten in the wilderness around it, and again Ezra wondered what it was that brought those people out there to scour a living from the hostile land.

The endless Kansas prairie slid by. It would be eight hours before they reached Wichita. Ezra leaned back and closed his eyes, concentrating upon his forward plans. There were a thousand things to be done when he got to San Francisco. He was looking forward to seeing Theo again.

It had been so long since any man had touched her that at first Sarah thought she must be dreaming; but the hand trying to push her legs apart was too clumsily insistent for a dream. She awoke in a sudden crescendo of terror to find the rough bulk of a man's body in the bed next to her. Her first panicked thought was that he would wake Katie, but as the groping hand touched her she convulsed, jerking her whole body away and opening her mouth to shout. Before she could make a sound a calloused hand clamped down on her face like a vice, almost suffocating her, jamming her head back down hard on the bed.

"Shut ya face!" the man said. "Hear me?"

It was Docherty. He stank of cheap whisky and his body smelled unclean. He had on nothing but a flannel night-shirt pulled up above the waist. She could feel the hardness of him against her upper thigh. Still holding her down with the flat of his hand on her face, Docherty rolled on top of her. He was hard and immovable. His unshaven face rasped against her cheek, and he started licking her ear like an animal. Totally revolted, hatred and loathing searing her mind like a white-hot blade, Sarah made an agonized sound and bucked her body, arching her back against his weight to dislodge him.

"'At's a girl," he leered in the darkness. "'Y'like that?" Sarah wrenched her body around, trying desperately to get him away from the center of her, thrashing her head from side to side to break his grip. His knee thrust against

her thighs and he was hurting her, bearing down hard to make her part her legs. She fought like a tigress to try to stop him but he was too strong, too heavy. She could feel her thighs being forced apart, feel the hot, thick bulk of him thrusting against her groin, and there was a small part of her that told her not to fight, not to struggle, give in, let it be, what did it matter?

Once more she managed to wrench her body away from his, and this time she got her hands free. She clawed at Docherty's face, feeling the skin tear beneath her fingernails, the slick slip of blood. With a smothered oath, Docherty knocked her hands aside and backhanded her flat on the bed.

"Hellcat bitch!" he hissed, as she fell back half-stunned. He took hold of her cotton nightdress at the neckband and ripped it off her, then pushed her legs apart and thrust himself into her. The sharp, swift pain penetrated Sarah's fuddled thoughts. Afterwards she remembered thinking, quite clearly and logically, as if she were watching it happen to someone else, that she was being raped, that this ugly, grunting, drunken animal was raping her. The lower part of her face had no feeling in it. As if her mind were not part of the body which was being used, she realized that she must do something. Despair and shame flooded through her, and she turned into a raging tigress, her hands clawing at Docherty's face and hair, her head and body thrashing about the bed in utter revulsion.

"No!" she tried to shout. "No!" It was not just this filthy thing on her body at which she was trying to scream. Sarah was screaming at the whole cruel succession of years which had brought her to this grubby shack, victim of this loathsome creature, at something in herself which had always turned away love. Thrashing, moaning, clawing at any part of Docherty she could reach, tears of rage, and disgust streaming down her face, Sarah tried to dislodge the rigid thing inside her. Docherty reared up above her like a tormented demon, eyes wild, gasping breath thick and fetid.

"Fuck . . . bitch!" he gasped.

"No!" she sobbed. "No!"

She made one last desperate lunge for his eyes, and he went berserk. Eyes ablaze with lust and rage, he hit her

with his fist. Red and yellow lights exploded behind Sarah's eyes and she fell off the edge of a yawning pit into blackness and deeper layered blackness beyond that, down and down into the very maws of degradation.

"Teach ya," Docherty grunted. "Know better next time."

Then he finished what he had come to do.

After a while he pulled himself out of her inert body and stood looking down at her. He patted her belly absently, the way a man will pat a horse, and wiped himself on the remnants of her nightdress. Then he went out of the room.

The next day Sarah walked down Market Street holding her daughter's hand. Her whole body was a solid mass of pain, her face puffed and bruised. Katie prattled away as they walked, but Sarah was not really listening to anything except the sullen, dull ache in her heart. Until last night she had thought she had a decent life there in Wichita, drab though the little frontier town was. She taught each morning at the little school behind St. John's Episcopal Church, and augmented that tiny income by helping her sister Dora and Docherty her husband in the general store on Main.

At least today was Saturday, so she did not have to be at the school. As for the store, well, that could wait, she thought. First things first. Nothing of her feelings showed on her bruised face as she knocked on the door of the frame shack that housed Phyl Bounden's hand laundry.

"Come in, come in, whoever ye are!" Phyl shouted cheerfully from inside. She was standing with her arms in a tub of suds, a washboard slanted against her wet bosom. Her face was rosy, her white-blond hair straggling damp in the steamy air. Phyl—her name was Phyllis, but everyone called her Phyl—had come to Wichita in '71, buying a quarter section from a woman named McCarty who had contracted consumption and was moving to New Mexico with her man and her two sons. The farm was about a mile out of town, and Phyl and her husband Jim were gradually improving it, using the money she earned by washing other people's clothes and Jim's income from working part time as a bar-tender at the Keno House and

any odd jobs of carpentry which came his way. Phyl's two children, Sally and Louisa, were fourteen and eleven respectively: they helped out with the farm chores after school. All of them loved little Katie as if she was their own family. She had spent many happy hours at the Bounden place, always delighted to be with them.

"My Lord of Mercy!" Phyl said as Sarah came into the shack. "What's happened to you, girl?"

"I fell," Sarah said, wanting to tell her but knowing that she could not, not now. "Don't worry, it's nothing."

"Hmm," Phyl said. Her face had that look that said, well, I'll accept it, but don't think I am stupid enough to believe it. She was offended that Sarah did not want to confide in her. If she had to bet money on it, she would have said someone had hit Sarah. Phyl and Jim Bounden had been married a long time, and they had had their scraps.

"Phyl, I've got some family business to see to," Sarah said. "I wondered if Katie could stay with Sally and Louisa for a few days."

"Why, sure, darlin', and they'll be glad to have her there. You've to go away, then?"

"I'm . . . not sure yet," Sarah said, sure as she would ever be of anything. "I have to see a lawyer. Then I'll know."

"Well, it's of no importance. We'll be glad to have Katie with us. You'd like to come out to the farm, wouldn't you, darlin'?"

"Thee the duckth," Katie lisped.

"That's right, see the ducks," Phyl said. "With Sally and Louisa."

"Thally," Katie said. "L'isa."

"You don't mind?" Sarah said to Phyl.

"It's important, by the sound of it."

"Yes," Sarah said. A matter of life and death, she thought.

"Well then, you go on about your business and don't worry. Katie will be fine with us. Won't you, Katie?"

"Thee the duckth," Katie said.

"There," Phyl said, as if that settled everything.

"You'll . . . you'll be a good girl, Katie?" Sarah said,

praying that her voice would not break and betray her. "While you're staying with Auntie Phyl and the girls?"

Katie wasn't taking any notice. She was engrossed in a carton lying on one side of the shack. There was a spider in it.

"Look at the thpider, mama," she said. "Look at the thpider."

"I have to hurry," Sarah said, feeling now as if her heart was going to break audibly. She could hardly breathe and she had to look up at the ceiling so that the tears would not fill her eyes.

"Off you go then," Phyl said, plunging her hands back into the suds. "And don't worry yourself. We'll look after Katie."

"Yes, please," Sarah said. "Look after her."

Phyl looked at her strangely for a moment, nonplussed by the feeling in Sarah's voice. Sarah avoided her eyes. Oh God, help me walk away, she thought.

"Goodbye, darling," she said to Katie.

"Bye, mama," Katie said, without looking up. She was trying to see where the spider had gone. It had crawled into a crack in the wall.

Sarah went out and walked unseeing up Market Street, her eyes flooded with tears she dare not spill, would not let herself spill. People said hello to her, and she must have answered them. One or two of them looked at her oddly: it didn't matter. Nothing mattered any more. She felt dead inside, as if her belly had turned to lead.

She went into Martin's Gun Shop. The bell tinkled on the door, and old James Martin came out from his workshop, glasses on the end of his nose. He regarded her gravely over the top of them, as if she had come to be reprimanded.

"Well, if it isn't Sarah Conway," he said. "What the deuce has happened to you, my dear?"

"I had a fall, Mr. Martin," Sarah said. "It's nothing."

"Very nasty," he said.

"I want a gun," she said, quickly, before all courage fled.

"Well, my dear," he said. "That is why I am here."

She picked out a Smith & Wesson. The old man seemed to be happy enough with her explanation that she was frightened of prowlers.

"Riff-raff," he said. "Town is full of riff-raff."

He explained how the little gun worked; it seemed simple enough.

"It's a thirty-two," he said. "That means .32 of an inch across the base of the slug. Anything heavier than that would probably jump right out of your hand."

"Could you load it for me?" she said.

"Why, sure," he said frowning a little. He rummaged about in a drawer and came up with a cardboard box of bullets. They looked like fat deadly insects. "I'll just put in five. That way the hammer will lie on an empty chamber. Less dangerous to carry that way."

Sarah thanked the old man and paid him putting the little pistol into her reticule. It seemed to weigh a ton, and she felt sure that everyone she passed in the street must know what she was carrying. She turned left into Main Street from Douglas, and walked up on the left-hand side of the street so that she wouldn't have to pass the big saloons, Billy Collins's place and Emil Warner's. It was probably too early for there to be many cowboys there, but the prostitutes were already out in force, parading brazenly outside the saloons in their white-tasselled boots and loud finery. Decent women stayed off that side of the street, and that way there was no trouble. They would scratch your eyes out as soon as look at you.

At the top of the street she could see the familiar sign above the store: DOCHERTY—HARDWARE—GENERAL GOODS—CLOTHING. It had never been much. Tommy and Dora got a living out of it, and managed to save a few dollars, but they couldn't compete with Karatofsky. Tommy paid Sarah four dollars a week and her keep for helping out in the store. It was as much as Sarah needed, with her stipend from the school. She had never asked her sister or brother-in-law for a penny more, even though she knew she could have earned ten times what they paid her. Old Jake Karatofsky had asked her a hundred times to go and work for him but she had always refused. She told the old man that she owed everything to Dora and Tommy. She smiled a

cold and mirthless smile now at the irony of that as she turned into the store.

It was cool and dark inside. There was only one customer in the place; Dora was weighing out some dried apples for her. Tommy Docherty was over on the far side of the store, rearranging a display of pans behind the counter. When he saw Sarah coming in he flushed guiltily and turned his back on her, but not before she saw that his face was marked and bruised where she had beaten ineffectually against it.

Dora looked up, her face dark with a frown. She made as if to say something, but Sarah ignored her and walked over to the counter behind which Tommy Docherty stood. She took the pistol out of her handbag.

"Tommy," she said.

He turned round and he saw the gun and his eyes widened. Sarah closed her eyes and pulled the trigger. The explosion was not as loud as she had expected, but the effect of the bullet was astonishing. It smashed Tommy Docherty back against the pyramid of pans he had just erected, bringing the whole thing down in a clattering, cascading cacophony of tin. Even as Docherty reeled back, Sarah was pulling the trigger again, and then again and again and again, until it made a dull, clicking noise and she opened her eyes. Docherty was lying in a heap on the floor, pans still rolling around his body. His eyes stared sightlessly at the ceiling; the front of his shirt was a bloody mess. There was a strange, high-pitched noise that it took Sarah a moment to identify. She finally realized that it was Dora, screaming.

"Murder!" Dora shouted. "Oh, murder, murder, murder!"

She ran out into the street still screaming, her eyes as big as saucers. The woman she had been serving started to edge towards the door and the movement caught Sarah's eye. She turned, and the woman froze, terrified. She stared in utter terror at Sarah, as though Sarah had suddenly become the devil incarnate. Fool of a woman, Sarah thought vexedly. She walked out of the store and into the bright morning sunlight, the gun still in her hand, and crossed the street diagonally towards the court house. As

she crossed the dusty intersection she saw Dora coming down the steps, dragging Marshal Meagher by the sleeve as that worthy tried to shrug into his jacket. What a stupid woman Dora was, Sarah thought impatiently. She had always been stupid. Did she honestly imagine that she had to go and fetch the marshal, that Sarah would not naturally come to him?

"All right, Mrs. Conway," Mike Meagher said, coming slowly towards her, his eyes wary, walking on the balls of his feet. "Give me the gun, there's a good girl."

"Oh," Sarah said, realizing for the first time that she still had the weapon in her hand. "The gun."

She extended it towards Meagher, who flinched as the barrel came level.

"It's all right," she said, her voice hollow. "It's empty."

"Just let go of the gun, Mrs. Conway," Meagher said, his voice just that shade edgy. "Drop it on the ground, please."

Sarah raised her eyebrows, but dropped the gun on the ground. Meagher picked it up in one smooth movement, not seeming even to bend. Now Sarah noticed the faint sheen of perspiration on his upper lip, and she smiled to herself. He was frightened of me, she thought, how strange!

"I'd like you to come with me now, Mrs. Conway," Meagher said.

"Yes," Sarah said. "Of course, Mr. Meagher."

"The bitch!" Dora said, her voice rising. "Lock her up, the bitch!"

"All right, Mrs. Docherty," Meagher said. "That'll be enough of that kind of talk!"

"She's murdered my Tommy!" Dora shouted. Her voice was on the rise with each word she said, and people were looking across the plaza in curious interest. "She killed him in cold blood, my own sister! She killed my husband and I'll see her hanged for it!"

She launched herself at Sarah, hands clawed, spittle flecking her thin lips. Meagher short-armed her away, and Dora stood panting, eyes wild, hands clenching and unclenching.

"Murderess!" she screeched. "Shameless whore!"

A crowd of people had gathered, and Mike Meagher quickly hustled Sarah off the bright, sunlit plaza and into the cool darkness of the court house.

"You'd better stay here, Mrs. Conway," he said to her. "Just for a while."

He jerked his head at his deputy, and the man nodded. Then Meagher went out into the street again. Sarah went to the window and looked out. The marshal was telling the knot of spectators to go on about their business. His voice, for all its soft and definite lilt of Irish brogue, was firm and authoritative. Then he took hold firmly of Dora Docherty's arm and walked her back to the store across the plaza. Dora went along, albeit unwillingly, and after a while Meagher came out and talked to some men. She saw one of the men run down the street. Gone to get Doctor Fabrique, she thought.

She wasn't really interested. She felt only the most enormous lassitude. She sat down in a chair and thought of nothing until Meagher came back into the office. She had no idea how long it had taken. The marshal made a gesture with his chin, and the deputy got up and went out. Meagher took the seat he had been occupying, and turned to face Sarah.

"Well, Mrs. Conway," he said. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No," she said.

"I think you'll have to do better than that, ma'am," he said. "You just killed a man. You can't just kill someone and then refuse to talk about it."

"Oh?" Sarah said, disinterested. She looked around the marshal's office. It was sparsely furnished, just a couple of upright chairs, a roll-top desk, a gun case full of carbines and shotguns, and the swivelling bentwood chair in which Meagher was sitting.

"Ma'am?" Meagher said.

"You want me to say I killed him, marshal?" Sarah said. "Very well, I killed him. And I'd do it again. I am glad he is dead. He was a wicked man."

"Why did you kill him?"

"I refuse to discuss it."

"You're going to have to, Mrs. Conway."

"No. Nobody can make me."

"There's someone, ma'am," he said.

She looked at him and her face said she did not believe him. There was no one who could ever make her give her reasons for killing Tommy Docherty. No one.

"The judge, ma'am," Meagher said. "At your trial."

His words turned Sarah's heart to stone.

By the time the trial opened everyone in Sedgwick County had heard the details of Tommy Docherty's violent death, and there were forty different theories as to why Sarah Conway had emptied her little Smith & Wesson revolver into the storekeeper's chest. Docherty's cronies at Billy Collins's saloon exchanged smirks: Tommy had often told them that he wouldn't mind getting a leg across that one. Not a few of them had replied that he wasn't the only one. She was a handsome woman, Sarah Conway. Tommy said she'd been an actress and everyone knew about actresses. He'd told them how she came to have that strange, croaky voice, too; something to do with being in the big Chicago fire in 1871.

From knowing smirks in the cribs and deadfalls to moral indignation in the frame houses of the better-off citizens of Wichita, the conversations and arguments raged, studded with manufactured surprise and insincere concern. In stores and laundries—excepting Phyllis Bounden's, of course, everyone knew she and the Conway woman were thick as thieves—in offices and hotel lobbies, everyone was talking about the Conway case. They said she wouldn't say anything about her motives for killing Docherty: strange, that. Mind you, he'd been no better than he had to be. More to the whole thing than met the eye, people said, nodding hello to Dora Docherty on the street and hoping she was bearing up well under the shock of it all. Dora was bearing up exceptionally well. She was telling

her story to as many as would listen to it, preacher's wife or fallen woman, elaborating in minor detail from time to time, adding an innuendo here, a subtle expression there, until she had enough dark hints and enough knowing looks in it to satisfy the most ravenous appetite for titillation. Word spread gradually far beyond the narrow environs of Wichita, out into the open country to where farmers' wives, twenty and thirty miles from town, buffalo hunters, soldiers—and soldiers' wives—knew all about "the terrible thing" that had happened. With almost one mind every one of them determined to be in Wichita when the trial began. It wasn't every day that you saw a famous actress tried for murder.

All that was common knowledge by then. Sarah had never spoken of her earlier life, or of her celebrity, but once Marsh Murdock, publisher of the *Wichita Eagle*, printed her picture in the paper the cat was let out of the bag with a vengeance. Hacks from every newspaper in the East descended on Wichita like locusts. Didn't they know who Sarah Conway was? Hadn't they any idea of her fame? They unearthed—and printed—every single thing they could find out about Sarah, and added a lot of other things that were pure invention. Wichita's good women were astonished, and appalled. Imagine that woman being here all this time with never so much as a word about her past! It seemed to most of the people who had known her only as the somewhat drab woman with the croaky voice who taught the kindergarten at St. John's, or as Dora Docherty's sister, that these revelations about Sarah Conway's colored past only confirmed what a deep, secretive woman she must always have been. Anyone who could keep her past so carefully hidden like that probably had a great deal more to hide, they said. No smoke without fire.

Throughout the May weekend prior to the opening of the trial people poured into Wichita in hundreds. Not a room could be had in any of the hotels. The town had a sort of carnival air. Families of farmers rumbled down Douglas Avenue in wagons, their tow-haired kids gawking at the cowboys and the whores in their white-tasselled boots. Enterprising touts set up stalls all along Market Street: "Find the Lady," "Acey-Deucey," coconut shies,

peep shows. A fellow named Gus Wells set up a carousel operated by a steam engine on a vacant lot south of Saunders' Variety Theater, and did land-office trade. Hawkers dashed through the crowds on the sidewalks selling dime novels, and hastily concocted booklets purporting to tell *The True Life Story of Sarah Conway; The Renowned Actress: Her Early Struggles, Eventual Success and Marriage*; and *The Awful Events of that Bloody Day in Wichita, Kansas*.

For once, cattle and cowboys were not the only preoccupations of the citizens of Wichita, a fact upon which, on Saturday night, the Texans proceeded to capitalize. There were eight shooting affrays in Delano—none fatal—and three stabbings. For once the signs that the city council had posted on the entrances to town were true: EVERYTHING GOES IN WICHITA!

Sarah Conway was being held in the suite of rooms on the ground floor of the court house. She was guarded day and night by one of Meagher's deputies, although there was no need for it: Sarah had not the faintest desire to escape. Indeed, she was apparently not interested in anything. The food sent over for her from the Occidental usually lay untouched on the tray until it was cold and uneatable. Sometimes she drank the coffee, or nibbled on some bread, but she ate hardly at all. She was wan and drawn, and asked constantly about her daughter. They would not permit Phyl Bounden to bring the child to see her. It would be too hard on the child, they said, taking no account of how cruel it was to Sarah.

Sometimes she watched the crowds on the street, hating them impartially. They were treating her as an amusement, a welcome change in the unchanging tenor of their days. Nothing ever happened in Wichita, unless you counted one of the cowboys killing another, or a stabbing in the cribs of Delano. Sarah Conway's trial was more fun than a county fair.

The court house was on the corner of Main and First Streets, a solid building whose ground floor was half taken up by the courtroom, the balance by the offices of the marshal and minor court officers. These latter had been dispossessed by Sarah Conway, for they could hardly put

her into the dungeon below, with its stone floors, its rudimentary sanitary arrangements and its permanent, ammoniac stink of male urine. They had read the indictment handed down by the grand jury: that she, Sarah Conway, at the County of Sedgwick and the State of Kansas on the 30th day of April 1873 did feloniously and unlawfully kill Thomas Peter Docherty by means of a revolver by her wielded, and cause the death of Thomas Peter Docherty, then and there resident in the city of Wichita, contrary to the laws and statutes in such case made and provided and against the peace and dignity of the State of Kansas.

"You understand?" the county attorney asked her. He was a short man with a heavy moustache and eyes like black olives.

"I understand, Mr. Bowman," she said.

"Have you a lawyer?"

"No."

"Do you know one?"

"No."

"Then the court will appoint one for you."

"I don't want a lawyer."

"You don't have any choice," Bowman said.

The lawyer came to see her the following day. He was a thin, nervous young man of perhaps twenty-nine. His name was James Beecham, and he was exactly three years out of law school.

"I . . . I've been appointed to defend you, Mrs. Conway," he said, gawking at her as if he could not actually believe that she was who she was. "Can . . . I sit down?"

"Of course," she said. "But you are wasting your time."

"Wasting—wasting my time?" he said. His Adam's apple was very prominent. It went up and down when he was agitated, she noticed. It almost made her smile; but only almost.

"I am going to plead guilty," she said. "What will happen to me?"

"Ma'am, I don't know," he said. "I—they—it—you could—they could hang you."

"Hang me?"

"I don't think they would," he said hastily.

"Then prison, you mean? How long?"

"A long time, ma'am," he said. "If you plead guilty."

"I am guilty," she said quietly. "I shot him."

"Yes, but maybe we could show that it wasn't pre-meditated—"

"It was," she said firmly. "I planned it the preceding night. I went and bought the gun fully intending to kill him. And then I did it."

"Why?"

"That is not important."

"I beg to differ, Mrs. Conway," Beecham said. "It is vital that I know."

"I'm sorry," Sarah said. "I will not discuss it."

"Mrs. Conway," he said, "there has to be a reason for your killing this man. One does not kill without reason."

"I did not say there was no reason," Sarah said. "I said I did not wish to discuss what those reasons were."

"You will be on oath on the witness stand, Mrs. Conway," the young man said. "You will be required to answer."

"And if I do not?"

"Then you will be in contempt of court."

"Ah," she said, and this time she did smile, for the first time in many days. It was not much of a smile for all that. "You mean they will hang me a second time?"

"It is no joking matter, Mrs. Conway. I beg of you to confide in me. I cannot be of any help to you at all if you do not."

"I have told you all you need to know," she said. "I killed Docherty. I planned to do it and I knew what I was doing when I did it."

"You cannot go into court and throw away your life!" James Beecham said, his voice anguished. "What about your child?"

Sarah shook her head. "No more now," she said, and her lawyer shrugged and got up, closing his briefcase.

"Mrs. Conway—" he began, but she shook her head resolutely.

Katie, she thought, as the door boomed shut and the silence filled the room like floodwater. Who will take care of my little girl?

Circuit Judge Ira T. Masters opened court on May 10, 1873 in the jammed courtroom at Wichita. It was a warm day; and the temperature in the room was soon into the eighties, despite the fact that every window in the place was wide open. The men folded their jackets across their knees and loosened their stiff collars; women fanned themselves vigorously and silently vowed that, if they returned on the morrow, they would leave their stays on the bedpost.

The judge sat behind a wide, impressive, cherry-panelled desk in an enormous, high-backed, leather-bottomed chair. He was the very picture of the dignity of the law. To his left he laid a heavy, black, leather-bound Bible. To his right, the gavel and a notepad and pencil. Judge Masters was a meticulous man. He would take notes of every piece of evidence that was, to his way of thinking, worth drawing again to the attention of the jury. He glanced at them now: they looked like the usual collection of farmers and cattlemen, sprinkled with shopkeepers and merchants. The mixture as many times before, he sighed.

"Very well," he said, rapping on the bench with the gavel. He looked at the State Prosecutor, Edward Fisher.

"Mr. Fisher, are you ready for the prosecution?"

"Ready, your honor," Fisher said. He was a very tall man, with the pronounced stoop of someone too conscious of his advantage over his fellows. His hair was almost theatrically long, and his features heavy and blunt. People told Fisher that he was an imposing figure in court and, being immensely vain, he believed them. He was looking forward to this case. It was open and shut; but it was important for all that. It would receive national coverage in the Press. He would be famous, and that was no small thing for a man with his eye on the governor's chair in the state capitol. He would be in good shape when he talked to the party bosses in the fall.

"Mr. Beecham?" Judge Masters said.

"Ready for the defense, your honor," Beecham said.

"The charge against the defendant, Sarah Conway, is that she did wilfully and with premeditation murder Thomas Peter Docherty. How does the defendant plead?"

"Not guilty, your honor."

"I wish to plead guilty, sir, but Mr. Beecham will not

permit me to do so," Sarah said, rising from her chair. There was a shocked outburst of surprise from the spectators in the courtroom. Judge Masters stilled it instantly with one sharp rap of his gavel.

"Let me say at the very outset of this hearing that if there is the slightest disturbance in this courtroom at any time—and for any reason—I shall have it cleared without a moment's hesitation!" He paused to let his message sink in. "Now, Mrs. Conway. You say you wish to plead guilty?"

"I do, your honor."

"Then why does your attorney plead you not guilty, madam?"

"He does so without my permission, sir."

"Gentlemen, will you approach the bench?"

The lawyers went forward and Judge Masters leaned over, frowning.

"What's all this about, boy?" he whispered angrily to Beecham.

"It's—Your honor, I believe that pleading Mrs. Conway not guilty is the only way that this court can establish her motive for killing Docherty," young Beecham said.

"Has no motive been established?"

"None, your honor. She absolutely refuses to discuss the reason she shot the man."

"Is this true, Mr. Fisher?"

"It is, your honor. It makes absolutely no difference to the state's case, of course. We have established intent and—"

"We shall come to all that, Mr. Fisher," the judge said heavily. "No need to give me a preview. Thank you, gentlemen."

The lawyers returned to their places, and Judge Masters frowned at Sarah, his face severe.

"I shall instruct the clerk to record a plea of not guilty," he said. "Proceed, Mr. Fisher."

"Very well, your honor," Fisher said, rising to his feet and turning to face the jury. "Gentlemen of the jury, the facts in this case are plain, simple and unvarnished. On the morning of April 30th that woman"—he swung about dramatically and pointed at Sarah with levelled finger

—"that woman purchased a Smith & Wesson .32 revolver at Martin's Gun Shop on Main Street. She walked one block north to the store of Thomas Peter Docherty, her brother-in-law. There and then she emptied the gun into his body, killing him instantly. The state will produce James Martin, who will testify that it was Sarah Conway who bought the murder weapon—*this* murder weapon!"

He held up the nickel-plated gun and turned it so that it caught the sunlight. Every neck in the room was craned to see it.

"The state will call Anna Smith, who was in the store when Docherty was killed, and was an eyewitness to the foul and wicked deed. We will also call the widow of the murdered man, Dora Docherty, whose sister is that same, remorseless murderess—Sarah Conway!"

Again he levelled that accusing finger across the courtroom at her, and every head in the place turned towards her. Sarah bowed her head, but not in shame. She was afraid someone might detect the faint smile on her lips. As Fisher had made his dramatic accusation, she had for some reason thought of Kieron. If he had been there to see it, he would have shaken his head in disgust at such hamming.

"God!" he'd have said. "I've seen circus clowns do better!"

She sat like stone as the witnesses paraded one by one in front of her: a woman who had seen her going into Martin's store; the old gun merchant himself, glasses on the end of his nose, eyes rheumy with age and drink; Anna Smith, the woman who had stared at her, transfixed with terror, as she walked out of the Docherty store. All of them unhesitatingly agreed with the State Prosecutor that it was she, Sarah Conway, and no other that had done this awful thing. Again and again Fisher asked the same question.

"And do you see that woman in this room today?"

"Yes."

"Point her out to the jury!"

The accusing finger pointing to her, the shamed eyes that would not meet hers. Except for Dora. Dora's eyes were hot with the lust for revenge.

"You and the defendant are sisters, are you not?" Fisher asked her smoothly.

"That's right," Dora said. "She's the oldest."

"Where were you born?"

"In Fort Des Moines, Iowa."

"And your sister?"

"The same."

"She lived at home all her life, until she became an actress?"

"No," Dora said. "She was married off. She went to live in Kanesville."

"Was this Kieron Conway that she married then?"

"Oh no," Dora said. "That was much later."

There was a buzz of conversation in the courtroom. It was all coming out now, wasn't it? Married at least twice, and heaven knew what else besides. It was true, all actresses were the same. Morals of alley cats.

Judge Masters banged his gavel and the whispering stopped as if someone had thrown a switch.

"What was the name of Mrs. Conway's other husband then?"

"Objection, your honor," Beecham said. "I fail to see where counsel's line of questioning is leading, or what bearing it has upon the murder of Docherty!"

"That's two objections, Mr. Beecham," the judge said, "but I take your point. What's all this leading to, Mr. Fisher?"

"Your honor, I contend it's vital for us to know about this woman's past. Her entire life has bearing upon the matter."

"I fail to see why," Judge Masters said urbanely. "Objection sustained. Try another tack, Mr. Fisher."

"Very well, your honor," Fisher said. "Now, Mrs. Docherty, I know this is distressing, but I want you to try and bear up as best you can. I want to talk about when your sister came to live with you."

"Yes, sir," Dora said. "Needed our charity then, she did! And look what happened: she killed my Tommy!"

"Yes, yes," Fisher said hastily, as he saw the judge's gavel go up. "We'll come to that later. Your sister came to live with you when?"

"Just before Christmas, 1871. She'd lost everything in the Chicago fire. Husband died in the blaze. She had practically nothing. And she had something wrong with her throat. Burned in the flames, she said."

"You and your husband took her in. Her child as well, I believe?"

"That's right, sir. She had this baby with her. Not more than two spoonfuls of sugar, it wasn't, poor little mite. Tommy and me, we gave it the best of everything." *And look what thanks we got*, her thin face said.

"So for two years your sister received your charity. Did she pay for her keep?"

"No, sir. After she got better, Tommy gave her a job in the store. He gave her money for herself and her food, and a place at the back of the store for herself and the baby."

"He also arranged for her to teach at St. John's school, did he not?"

"Yes, sir, he did. He went to see Mr. Hope, and put Sarah's name forward. That's how it came about."

"Now, Mrs. Docherty, I want you to cast your mind back to that day, that terrible day, when your husband was killed."

"Yes, sir," Dora whispered.

"Tell us exactly what happened," Fisher said. "In your own words."

"Well, it all happened so fast. I was serving Anna Smith. I think it was dried fruit she was buying. I saw Sarah come in the front entrance, and thought she looked sulky, that was what I thought. She didn't usually come in on a Saturday morning, and I was surprised. Also because she didn't have her little girl with her. She usually had Katie with her no matter where she went. Anyway I went back to serving Mrs. Smith, and the next minute I saw Sarah with the gun in her hand and then . . . and then . . ."

She buried her face in her hands, and Fisher patted her shoulder in an avuncular fashion.

"There, there, Mrs. Docherty," he said theatrically, looking at the jury. "We all understand what an ordeal it must have been. Do you think you can go on?"

"Yes, sir," Dora said, raising her head. There wasn't the

trace of a tear in her eyes, Sarah noticed. Dora glared at her malevolently and resumed her story. "I ran out across the plaza to get Marshal Meagher," she said. "And he took the gun off of her. That's all."

"Now, Mrs. Docherty," Fisher said, making each word fall like lead. "Can you think of any reason why Sarah Conway should have wanted to kill your husband?"

"No, sir, none. He was always kind to her. Never anything but."

"They never quarrelled, to your knowledge?"

"No, sir. I'm sure Tommy would have told me if they had."

"Now you'll forgive me, Mrs. Docherty," Fisher said, "but I have to ask you this: was there any sort of relationship between Mrs. Conway and your husband?"

"Relationship?" Dora said, her voice an outraged squawk. "No, sir, there was not!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Docherty," Fisher said suavely. "Your witness, Mr. Beecham."

"I think we'll stop there, gentlemen," Judge Masters said. "Court will adjourn until ten in the morning." He banged his gavel and stood up.

The first day was over.

Jim Beecham did not know why, but he wanted to save Sarah Conway's life more than he had ever wanted anything in his life. Perhaps it was the sheer perversity of the situation, the fact that, no matter how he tried, he could prise not one iota of information about her past out of Sarah Conway. After the first day he realized that he had an opening. He had managed to prevent Fisher from cracking it open in court—for the moment—but he knew then that he had a way into Sarah Conway's past. He went to see her in the court house that evening, and took a flask of hot coffee with him.

"This is kind, Mr. Beecham," she said. "You must be tired after such a hard day."

Nothing of her own fatigue, he thought, and she was on trial for her life. Sarah Conway was a remarkable woman and he told her so.

"Thank you," she said, a woman well used to compli-

ments, who saw no need to pretend coyness where none was necessary.

"Tell me," Beecham said artlessly, "about Iowa."

"Iowa?" she said, surprised. "I thought you said it had no relevance to this case?"

"It probably doesn't," he said. "But I'd like to know, in case Fisher tries to introduce it again. You were born in Des Moines?"

"That's right. My father had a small place there."

"And you lived there until you . . . were married?"

"That's right," she said. "Until I was eighteen."

"What was your first husband's name?"

"Malone," she said. Her voice had a faint note of surprise in it, he noted. It was as if she was surprised to hear the name again, as though she had not heard it or spoken it for many years. "Charlie Malone."

"What happened to him? Were you divorced?"

"No, he died," she said. "In San Francisco."

"What year was that?"

"1856," she said. "Yes, 1856."

"Did you remain in San Francisco?"

"No, I went to stay with friends. In Kentucky."

"And then?"

"Why are you asking me all these questions?"

"I need to know about you, Mrs. Conway," he said.

"No," she said, and he felt the shutters coming down, the barring-off of the path he had been following.

"Mrs. Conway, I wish you'd let me help you!" Beecham said.

"I thank you, Mr. Beecham," Sarah said. "I do not want you to help me."

"Madam, I will not stand idly by and watch them hang you!" he burst out.

"Sir, what happens to me is not in your hands."

"As to that, Mrs. Conway, we'll see," he said.

He was angry and he stalked out of the court house without saying good night to Mike Meagher. Damned if I'll let her throw her life away, he thought as he stamped down Main Street, damned if I will. He went directly to the telegraph office and wrote a long message to a law-school friend who was now practicing law in San Francisco,

Cutler McAllister. Cutler was from one of the richest families in California, and knew everyone who was anyone. If it was possible to find out anything about Sarah Malone and her husband Charlie in San Francisco, Cutler would do it. "This is a matter of life and death," Beecham wrote. "Do your utmost to advise me at the earliest possible moment, whatever your findings are."

It was all he could do. The next day he had to make the biggest decision he had ever taken in his life: whether to put Sarah Conway into the witness box—thereby permitting Fisher to cross-examine her—or whether to rely upon his closing statement to the jury to state her case.

"God damn it, I need a drink!" he said, and headed for the Keno House.

It was almost midday, and James Beecham knew he had made the wrong decision. He had put Sarah on the stand, she had sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and then, quite simply, refused to do so. She answered his questions clearly and lucidly, precise as to detail. He turned to her reasons for shooting Tommy Docherty.

"You shot him for no reason at all?" he said.

"I did not say so," she replied.

"Then why did you shoot him?"

Silence.

"Your honor, the witness refuses to reply. Will the court so instruct her?"

"Are you asking me to pronounce your client a hostile witness, Mr. Beecham?" the judge asked, his eyes wide with not altogether pretended surprise.

"Your honor, I think it is vital to the defense's whole presentation that the jury be made aware of why Mrs. Conway felt it necessary to kill her brother-in-law."

"Objection, your honor," Fisher interposed sonorously. "It doesn't make any difference whether the jury knows how Mrs. Conway was feeling, or what her reasons were!"

"Unless those reasons show extenuating circumstances!" James Beecham flashed angrily.

"Gentlemen!" Judge said. "I'll have no squabbling in my court."

"Yes, sir," the two lawyers said, formally contrite.

"Mr. Beecham," the judge said patiently. "I think we have tried this line of questioning long enough. If your client will not answer you, there is nothing the court can do to make her."

"Very well, your honor," Beecham said. "I'll try something else. Mrs. Conway, if I were to produce a witness who would testify that your face was badly bruised, as if you had been beaten, on the day you killed Docherty, what would you say?"

"That he or she was mistaken."

"You are calling your friend Phyllis Bounden a liar, Mrs. Conway?"

Sarah pressed her lips together, trapped.

"I . . . no, I'm sorry. She is right. I had a fall. I'd forgotten."

"Where did this happen?"

"Outside the store."

"When?"

"Some nights before . . . the shooting."

"Suppose I were to suggest to you that someone had hit you, Mrs. Conway? What would you say to that?"

"I would say that you were wrong, Mr. Beecham," Sarah said, her voice almost inaudible.

"It wasn't Docherty?"

"Objection, your honor!"

"Sustained. Mr. Beecham, let's not have any conjecture! I haven't heard a smidgin of evidence to suggest that the victim ever laid a finger on your witness."

"Yes, sir," Beecham said glumly. "No further questions."

He looked at Fisher, and his heart sank when he saw Fisher wave a lordly hand.

"No questions," Fisher said, and Beecham knew the State Prosecutor felt he didn't have to dot his *is* and cross his *ts*—he had the case wrapped up. Sarah Conway was guilty and that was what the jury was going to confirm.

"Very well," Judge Masters said, banging his gavel. "We'll stop for lunch. Reconvene at two!"

"All rise!" bawled the clerk, and everyone stood as the judge stepped down from the bench and went into his

chambers. As soon as the door had closed there was a concerted rush for the door. Every newspaper reporter in town was dashing over to the telegraph office to get word to his paper that, barring a miracle, Sarah Conway was going to be pronounced guilty. Which left one enormous question in the air: would Judge Masters sentence her to hang?

Jim Beecham sat at the defense table until the courtroom was empty except for the sheriff's deputy. There was nothing more he could do, except plead for mercy when he made his closing address to the jury. He didn't think it would cut much ice.

"Damn!" he said, banging the table with his fist. Why wouldn't she tell him her reasons for killing Docherty? Was it shame? He was beginning to think that now. The marks on her face—Phyllis Bounden had told him she thought Sarah had been beaten. Had Docherty attacked her? It was quite likely, he thought. Docherty was anything but the saint that he had been painted in court, but Beecham knew he would have got nowhere introducing that kind of evidence into the case, especially when it was given by the kind of people who could state it as a fact.

"Are you James Beecham?" a voice said behind him.

He turned to see a well-dressed man in his mid-forties, solidly built, with a purposeful mouth and eyes that looked as if they had seen every trick in all the books, and knew a few that were not.

"I am, sir," he said.

"My name is Ezra Carver," the man said.

"Well, Sarah," Ezra Carver said. "Can you face it?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I can face it now."

"Good," Ezra said. "Let's go to court."

It had been a hectic four days. He had told her how Theo's frantic telegraph messages had found him in Kansas City, literally minutes before he was due to set out for San Francisco. It took several hours of exchanged and involved telegrams before Ezra had got the full story, but once he had it he swung into action with more enthusiasm than he had felt for anything in a very long time.

"It was the most remarkable set of coincidences," he told Sarah. "Not to mention luck."

"How do you mean, luck?" she asked. She wanted to ask him about Theo, and at the same time she was afraid to ask anything at all. She was numb with disbelief, relief, fear, anticipation. Too much all at once, too much.

"Your lawyer, Beecham, telegraphed a school friend of his, Cutler McAllister, in San Francisco. Did he tell you he was going to try to find out about your past?"

"No," Sarah said. "He told me nothing."

"Well, he asked Cutler McAllister to see what he could dig up on a woman named Sarah Malone who had lived in San Francisco, where her husband had died in 1856. The names Sarah Malone, Sarah Conway meant nothing to young McAllister, of course. Then he happened to mention it to his father."

"Hall?" she said.

"The same," Ezra smiled. "Needless to say, the name meant a very great deal to Hall McAllister, and he told his son about you, and about Charlie's death, and the connection with his Uncle Theo. Yes, Sarah, Theo is still a close friend of the McAllister family."

"So Hall told Theo?"

"Need you ask?" Ezra said. "When Theo learned that you had been located, he telegraphed to me at every stop along the track of the Ohio, Kansas and California Railroad. It must have cost him a fortune."

"I . . . it's all so hard to believe. That it's really happening. That it all happened."

"I know," Ezra said. "I found it hard to believe myself, but there was Theo's message, clear as a bell. He instructed me to get the best legal brains in the country out here to Wichita, and to put them at the disposal of this James Beecham, whoever he might be."

"Dear Theo," she said, trying to imagine what Theo would look like now. She wondered whether Ezra Carver had a photograph of his brother.

"I came on to Wichita right away, and found your young lawyer," Ezra said. "We had a long talk. He's a bright young man. Most other attorneys would have washed their hands of the whole thing. Not Beecham. He told me he was not only willing but eager to see if we couldn't find out the truth about Docherty's death."

"I remember how persistent he was," Sarah said. "He wouldn't accept what I told him."

"As I said, lucky for you," Ezra remarked. He had been impressed with Beecham, who had told him that he was a graduate of Kentucky University, and had studied law at Cincinnati Law College. Although his qualifications were excellent, clients were few and far between. Nevertheless, he had "hung out his shingle" in Wichita and taken odd jobs to make ends meet, washing dishes at the Texas House, and doing clerical work for Wichita businessmen. He told Ezra of his conviction that Docherty had attacked Sarah Conway, and Ezra nodded.

"What I want you to do is to round up as many witnesses as you can who'll testify what Docherty was really like," he said.

"We-ell," Beecham said reluctantly, "I'll have to scrape the barrel to do that, Mr. Carver. And I'm not sure the judge would accept—"

"You leave the judge to me," Ezra said. "Just get all the information you can. Affidavits will do. Tell whoever you're asking that they won't need to appear in court unless they want to."

"All right," Beecham said dubiously. "If you say so."

"I do," Ezra said, and went to see Judge Masters.

Ira T. Masters was a handsome figure of a man, tall, erect, blue-eyed as a Norseman, with a far-reaching stride that would have attracted attention on any town plaza. A devout Methodist, he had read law in his home town of Barclay, Ohio, and moved to Topeka, Kansas, when he was twenty-four. In that town he hung out his shingle, and his firm hand and unshakable principles won him a decent living and a reputation second to none. His offices were on the west side of Market Square, over the Hat Store. In April 1863 he was elected city attorney, his handsome margin of 250 votes over his nearest rival testimony of the growing regard in which he was held. In November 1864 he was chosen a presidential elector, and also prosecuting attorney for the 9th Judicial District. Four years later he was appointed a Kansas Circuit Judge by President Grant. He was fair, and he was stern, but he was not unbending. He was also not unmindful, when Ezra Carver asked to see him in his chambers, of his own ambitions to run the following year as a candidate for the United States Senate.

"Well, sir, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance," he said, waving Ezra to a chair. "I've heard a great deal about you."

"And I you, Judge Masters," Ezra lied. "They tell me you're a fair-minded man."

"I hope that's true, sir," Masters said, stroking his silvery side-whiskers.

"Then will you consider my request for an adjournment in the Conway case? A week, ten days, perhaps?"

Masters frowned. Ezra was putting him squarely on the horns of a dilemma. The evidence presented had been as simple as a child's alphabet. Motive, perhaps, had not been established, but motive was not a necessity in a case

where there had been eye-witnesses to the killing and where the murderess herself admitted to having done it.

"I'm afraid there would not seem to be any basis on which I could grant an adjournment," he said. "I don't want to sound inflexible, but no evidence—"

"That's just it," Ezra said. "That's why I need the time. This youngster, Beecham, didn't have the money or the resources that are at my disposal. If you can give me the few days I need to gather new evidence. . . ?"

"It would be highly irregular," Masters said.

"Judge, I can't over-emphasize how important this matter is to me," Ezra said, "and to my brother in California. If you can consider our request sympathetically, I think you will find us not ungrateful."

Masters looked at Ezra quickly, but there was no hint of expression on the railroad-builder's face.

"Mr. Carver, I have never taken a dollar of graft in my life, and I have no intention of starting now!" Masters said sharply. "I hope you realize that."

"Your reputation for probity is not in question," Ezra replied. "You are universally admired for it."

"Well," Masters said, mollified by the compliment, "I'll have to confer with the State Prosecutor. I can't see him agreeing. He has an open and shut case."

"If I could guarantee that Fisher would have no objection to an adjournment, would you grant one?"

"Why, ah, yes. Perhaps not a week, Mr. Carver. Four or five days at the outside. Until next Monday, say."

"All right," Ezra said. "We'll just have to work faster."

"And you'll talk to Fisher?"

"Of course," Ezra said.

Fisher was easier. Ezra had been dealing with men like State Prosecutor Edward Fisher all his life, and he knew exactly how they ticked. They met privately in the attorney's rooms at the Keno House, and Ezra put his proposition squarely on the table. Don't fight the adjournment, and there will be ten thousand dollars deposited anonymously into your campaign fund next fall when you run for governor. Fight it, and the money will go to your opponent.

"That's bribery, Mr. Carver!" Fisher spluttered. "I could have you arrested for this!"

"Your word against mine?" Ezra said, lifting his eyebrows slightly. "Why on earth should I want to bribe you?"

"To—uh—because. . . ." Fisher's voice trailed off and Ezra nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "Now listen to me. Your case against Sarah Conway will be exactly as strong next week as it is this. Win or lose, it will make no difference. That contribution will be paid."

"You mean, even if I get a guilty verdict?"

"Yes," Ezra said.

"All right," Fisher said. "I'll go and see Judge Masters right away."

"That's good of you," Ezra said.

When the trial reopened the following Monday morning the spectators were surprised to see that, directly behind the defense table, every seat in the front row was occupied by a severe-looking man in a precise dark jacket and knife-edged striped trousers. They looked exactly what they were, very expensive eastern corporation lawyers. James Beecham's face bore the expression of a man who had just learned how to turn lead into gold. And Sarah Conway's entire demeanor had changed. She sat erect, her face confident, even eager.

State Prosecutor Fisher took one look at the array of legal talent ranged behind the defense and his face fell a foot. All at once his dreams of sailing into the governor's mansion on the crest of the wave created by this case evaporated. He gave Ezra Carver a malevolent look, but if he noticed it Ezra gave no sign.

"Very well, Mr. Fisher," Judge Masters said. The State Prosecutor got to his feet heavily, like a man who is being sent on a suicide mission and knows it.

"Your honor," he said, "gentlemen of the jury. Since we have been adjourned for almost a week"—there was venom in his voice and in the look he gave Ezra Carver, but, as before, Carver seemed not to notice it—"I will

begin by refreshing your memories as to the exact sequence of the events of April 30th."

He described, as dramatically as he could, the murder of Docherty, the testimony of all the eye-witnesses who had seen Sarah that day. He laid heaviest emphasis on the fact that she had made no effort to deny that she had killed Docherty, and that she had done so under oath on the witness stand.

"The state believes that it has conclusively demonstrated that Sarah Conway shot and killed Thomas Peter Docherty and that her crime was premeditated murder. The state ask—no, demands!—the fullest punishment allowed by the law!"

Breathing heavily, Fisher sat down at his table, and there was a moment's silence. The judge looked at Jim Beecham, and Beecham nodded.

"Mr. Beecham?" Judge Masters said.

"If the court please," Beecham said, "the defense would like to recall Mrs. Dora Docherty."

There was pandemonium in the courtroom for a moment, a swell of speculation and surprise that was quelled in full spate by the vicious smack of Judge Masters's gavel.

"I would remind the spectators in this courtroom that my remarks on the opening day of this trial were not made in jest," he snapped. "If there is the slightest further disturbance, I will have the deputies clear the court!"

"Your honor," Edward Fisher said into the silence, "the prosecution would like to ask why at this late stage of events the defense is recalling witnesses who cannot possibly add anything to our knowledge of the facts."

"Mr. Beecham?"

"I hope to demonstrate that the exact opposite of that is true, your honor," Jim Beecham said.

"Very well," Judge Masters said. "Call the witness."

Dora Docherty came forward, her step and demeanor trepidant. She was reminded that she was still under oath, and took her place on the witness stand nervously. Only when her eyes met Sarah's did determination stiffen her spine.

"Now, Mrs. Docherty," Beecham said. "In your earlier testimony, you told the court that your husband had not

had any sort of personal relationship with the defendant. Is that correct?"

"Yes!" Dora Docherty said sharply. "Most definitely!"

"How about other women, Mrs. Docherty?"

There was a gasp of shocked surprise from the audience as Edward Fisher leaped to his feet shouting, "Objection, objection!"

"I think I shall have to agree, Mr. Beecham," Masters said. "Unless you have some valid reason for this line of questioning?"

"It's not only valid, your honor, it's vital," Beecham said.

"Very well," the judge said. "But tread softly, Mr. Beecham."

"Yes, sir," Beecham said. "Well, Mrs. Docherty?"

"Well what?"

"Shall I repeat the question?"

"No!" Dora Docherty said sullenly. "It's not . . . you don't have to. I heard what you said, and it's a lie! Tommy didn't go with other women!"

"Your honor," Beecham said. "The defense has affidavits from a dozen women and as many of Docherty's men friends categorically stating the exact opposite."

"Mr. Beecham, I'm warning you," Judge Masters said, leaning forward. "I won't allow witnesses of that nature in my court."

"The—ah, ladies, sir, of course not," Beecham said urbanely. "But if I can produce ten friends of Docherty's—male friends, I mean—who will testify that to their certain knowledge he frequented—"

"No!" Dora Docherty shouted. "It's not true, it's not, it's not!"

"It is, Mrs. Docherty," Beecham said, not triumphantly, "and I put it to you that you knew it."

"Oh," she said, starting to cry. "It's not fair."

"Neither is it fair to accuse Sarah Conway of cold-blooded murder, Mrs. Docherty. You know that's not the way it was, don't you?"

Dora Docherty looked at her sister and then at the floor.

"Yes," she said. "I know."

"Tell the court, Mrs. Docherty."

"He came in halfway through the night. His face was all bloody, scratched. I asked him where he'd been. He said he fell in a briar patch. I didn't believe it, but I had no idea he. . . . I thought it was . . . just another of those women."

"You and your husband no longer, ah, lived as man and wife?"

"No," she said, and her shudder was visible. "Not since. . . . Not since. . . ."

"Since you found out where he went at night, you mean?"

"Yes," she said.

"And what happened then? The day of the shooting?"

"I knew what had happened the minute she came into the store. I saw her face and I knew what must have happened. I was going to have it out with them, as soon as I had finished serving. Then she . . . she. . . ."

"Yes," James Beecham said. "I think we know the rest." He turned to face the State Prosecutor. "Your witness, counsellor," he said.

Fisher glowered at him and lumbered to his feet. He spent ten minutes taking Dora Docherty backward and forward through the testimony she had given on her first appearance, making much play of Docherty's kindness to Sarah, giving her work and somewhere to live, putting her name up to the city council for the teacher's job; but he knew there was no way to dispel the revelations that Beecham had drawn from the witness. He slouched back to his seat as Dora Docherty left the witness stand his face dark with anger. Dora Docherty hesitated as she pushed open the wicket gate and looked at her sister beseechingly. She wants to be forgiven now, Sarah thought, knowing she would never forgive. She made herself smile at Dora, and Dora's relief was instant and transparent.

"The defense would now like to recall Sarah Conway to the stand," Beecham said.

Ezra Carver leaned over and gently squeezed Sarah's shoulder. She turned and smiled at him, her eyes betraying the feelings she was keeping under control.

"You can do it, Sarah," Ezra said.

"Yes," she said. "I can."

It was not as hard as she had thought it would be. Beecham had made it easy. The jury, and everyone in the courtroom, had been set up for what was coming by what Dora Docherty had already said. When Sarah recounted the events of the night that Docherty had gone into her room in a low-pitched, matter-of-fact voice, the details caused no *frisson* of scandalized excitement, or murmur of squalid gossip. Sympathy and, indeed, a feeling of understanding radiated towards her from the body of the court as she told of making her heartbreaking decision to leave her baby with a friend and kill the man who had so cruelly mistreated her.

"I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger," she said. "And all I could think was 'You deserve it, you deserve it!'"

"Then what did you do?" Beecham asked, soft as a leaf falling. There was utter silence in the courtroom.

"I surrendered myself to Marshal Meagher," Sarah said.

"You never considered running away, escaping?"

"No," she said, surprised at being asked. "Of course not."

"Thank you," Beecham said. "Mr. Fisher?"

Fisher rose from his chair. He knew what he had to do now and he did it with as much aplomb as he could.

"Your honor," he said, "in view of the extraordinary change in our knowledge of this whole affair, I would like to move on behalf of the state that the jury be instructed to bring in a verdict of justifiable homicide!"

His ringing speech was more than the packed crowds in the courtroom could take, and they exploded in uproarious cheers and applause, totally ignoring the repeated banging of Judge Masters's gavel for almost five minutes. There was a mass exodus of newspaper reporters, dashing once more for the telegraph office down at the O.K.C. depot. They were all old hands at this business, and they knew an acquittal when they saw one. The word was already on the desks of the New York editors by the time the jury brought in the verdict that Judge Masters had instructed them to find, and Sarah Conway walked out of the Wichita courtroom a free woman. The sun was bright and clear, and people crowded around to shake her hand and pat

her back, and tell her that they had always known she was innocent. Ezra Carver came to her rescue, pushing a path for her at the foot of the steps.

"Mama!" Katie shouted as Sarah came down the steps.

"Katie?" she said. "Katie?"

And all at once Sarah Conway found herself weeping.

There was a farewell party. Everyone was there, everyone Sarah knew in Wichita. But not Dora Docherty. They said she had sold out to Jake Karatofsky and taken the train east. Nobody knew where she had gone, and for some reason Sarah found the news infinitely sad. She and Dora were kin, even if their lives had been spent as strangers to each other. She wished her sister well, wherever she was going. Ezra Carver had shipped in imported champagne to celebrate her acquittal, and Sarah found it strangely unsettling to be toasted by a State Prosecutor who, only a matter of weeks earlier, would cheerfully have seen her sentenced to death or life imprisonment.

Judge Masters kissed her hand, courtly as a beau. James Beecham came over and told her he was leaving Wichita.

"Got an offer of a partnership in Missouri," he said. "I guess I owe it all to you."

"Or to Ezra Carver," she said.

"Yes," Beecham said. "He's quite something."

She remembered how she had felt about Ezra all those years ago in San Francisco. Theo was the kind one, she had thought, Ezra harsh. Where Theo had compassion, Ezra showed none. *Ezra is like a shark*, she heard Charlie Malone say. *He kills without ever really knowing why. People like Ezra Carver never stop to wonder whether they're happy or not.* Something has changed him, she thought. There is compassion there now, even understanding. I wonder what happened?

She felt a constant excitement, a constant dread, when she thought of Theo. It was like knowing that Christmas was coming when you were a child, the same feeling. Have I changed much? Will he be different? Will he have changed as well? Will we still like each other? What shall I say when I see him again? What will he say to me? She lay awake night after night, wondering. And never coming

any closer to a single answer to any of her thousand questions.

Her guests were starting to leave, and she went across to say good night to the marshal. He was a fine man, and she told him so.

"That's kind of you, Mrs. Conway," Meagher said in that soft County Cavan brogue. "You'll come back one day and see us here in Wichita, now?"

"Of course I will, Mike," she said. "Take care of yourself."

"Never do anything else," he said, brown eyes twinkling.

When they were all gone, Ezra Carver came across the room and put his hand on her shoulder. He looked straight into her eyes and smiled, and for the first time Sarah realized that he was deeply weary, bone tired.

"Well, young woman," he said. "It took a long time to find you."

"Yes," she said.

"He's waiting," Ezra said. "I just got this."

He handed her a printed telegraph form. WHAT THE DEVIL IS KEEPING YOU? WHERE IS SARAH? WHEN WILL YOU BE HERE? ANSWER IMMEDIATELY. THEO.

"Shall I tell him we're leaving tomorrow?" Ezra Carver said.

"We?"

"Yes, we," he smiled. "I've got a railroad to build, Sarah. The whole future in front of me."

Sarah smiled. Dreams do come true, she thought.

"So have I," she said.

One woman held sway in
Carver's Kingdom

Sarah Hutchinson, married to an irresponsible wanderer when Theo Carver, the merchant adventurer, first met her, loved her and lost her.

Sarah, who was destined to become one of the greatest actresses of her day—and one of the most infamous.

Sarah Hutchinson, who irrevocably changed the lives of the ruthless brothers who had wrested riches and power from expanding America...

the men of

Carver's Kingdom

